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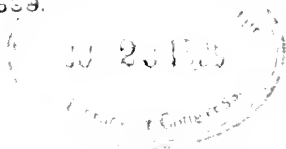
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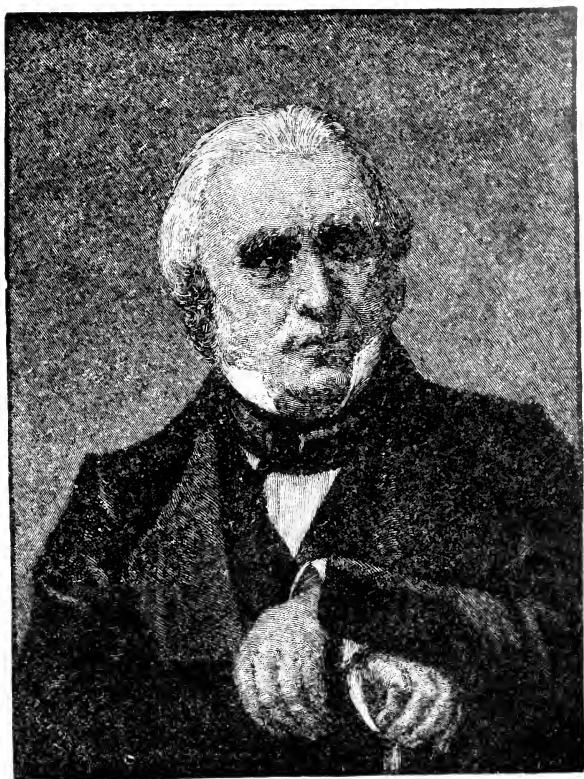
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THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

MILTON

BY

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

WITH NOTES BY

MARGARET A. EATON, A. B.



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INTRODUCTION.

Probably no writer who ever lived has succeeded in producing such scholarly, and at the same time such popular and intensely interesting work, as Thomas Babington Macaulay. Certainly his essays are the most brilliant series in the English language.

Macaulay's father was a Scotchman who had lived for some time in the West Indies and who, on his return to England, had joined the anti-slavery party. Thomas, his eldest son, was born at Rothley Temple, October 25, 1800. He was a remarkable child, with a passion for reading and a wonderful memory. He did not care for games nor for the companionship of boys of his own age, but amused himself by writing hymns, essays, poems and histories. At thirteen he wrote:—"The books which I am at present employed in reading to myself are, in English, Plutarch's "Lives," and Milner's "Ecclesiastical History;" in French, Fénelon's "Dialogues of the Dead." I shall send you back the volumes of Madam de Genlis's "*Petit Romans*" as soon as possible, and should be very much obliged for one or two more of them."

In 1818 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and soon distinguished himself in literature and in debate. Mathematics he hated and studied only under protest, but he read everything from Plato to the latest novel. He could take in the contents of a page almost at a glance and finish a whole book while another was reading a chapter. What he read he never forgot. He could repeat "Paradise Lost" by heart, and two newspaper poems which he had once read in a Cambridge coffee-house, he was able to recall word for word forty years later.

While at college he won the chancellor's medal for a poem on "Pompeii," and, after taking his degree, was elected to a fellowship.

Soon after he began to contribute to the magazines, and in 1825 his essay on Milton appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*. At that time the reputation of Milton was under a cloud in England owing to the influence of Johnson's life. This essay of Macaulay's was not so much a critical estimate of the poet as an eloquent appeal in his behalf. As such it had a wonderful success and its author rapidly became famous.

In 1825 he was admitted to the bar, but his literary work increased more rapidly than his law practice. Four years later, however, he gave up both to enter Parliament. Here he made many brilliant speeches and won renown as a debater. His conversational powers, too, were remarkable. Everything that he had ever read or heard he could recall on the instant, and his fund of information was exhaustless.

In 1834 he was made president of a Law Commission for India and for three years he lived in Calcutta where he obtained much of the information which makes his essays on Clive and Warren Hastings so absorbingly interesting.

On his return to England he again entered Parliament and became War Secretary in 1839. In spite of his many duties he still found time to write essays, and in 1842 made a new departure by publishing the "Lays of Ancient Rome."

Two years later he entered upon his greatest work, the "History of England from the Time of James II." His avowed purpose was to write a book which should "supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies." And, strange as it may seem, he succeeded. The volumes were awaited with the greatest eagerness and the publishers could hardly keep pace with the demand.

Only four volumes of this work were ever finished. Macaulay's incessant labors had told upon his strength and he died December 28, 1859, three years after receiving the title of

Baron. He was buried in Westminster Abbey near Johnson and Addison.

Macaulay's chief characteristic was his intensity. He never did anything by halves and it is this trait that often makes his writings only partially true. His style well repays careful study, for it is always clear and forceful and often full of glow and eloquence. There is not a feeble line in all his work. "The first rule of all writing," he has said, "that rule to which every other is subordinate, is that the work is used by the writer shall be such as most fully and precisely convey his meaning to the great body of his readers."

LIST OF MACAULAY'S CHIEF WORKS.

ESSAYS.

- Milton, 1825.
- The West Indies, 1825.
- The London University, 1825.
- Machiavelli, 1827.
- Social and Industrial Capabilities of Negroes, 1827.
- John Dryden, 1828.
- History, 1828.
- Hallam's Constitutional History, 1828.
- Mill on Government, 1829.
- Utilitarian Theory of Government, 1829.
- Southey's Colloquies on Society, 1830.
- Civil Disabilities of the Jews, 1831.
- Moore's Life of Byron, 1831.
- Boswell's Life of Johnson, 1831.
- Lord Nugent's Memorials of Hampden, 1831.
- Rev. Edward Nare's Memoirs of Mirabeau, 1832.
- Horace Walpole, 1833.
- Earl of Chatham, 1834.
- Sir James Mackintosh, 1835.
- Lord Bacon, 1837.
- Sir William Temple, 1838.

Gladstone on Church and State, 1839.

Lord Clive, 1840.

Von Rouke, 1840.

Leigh Hunt, 1841.

Lord Holland, 1841.

Warren Hastings, 1841.

Frederick the Great, 1842.

Madam D'Arblay, 1843.

Addison, 1843.

Barrere, 1844.

Earl of Chatham, 1844.

BIOGRAPHIES (ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA.)

Frances Atterbury, 1853.

John Bunyan, 1854.

Oliver Goldsmith, 1856.

Samuel Johnson, 1856.

William Pitt, 1859.

Lays of Ancient Rome, 1842.

History of England from the Accession of James II., 1848.

MILTON.

[*Edinburgh Review*, August, 1825.]

Towards the close of the year 1823, Mr. Lemon, deputy keeper of the state papers, in the course of his researches among the presses of his office met with a large Latin manuscript. With it were found corrected copies of the 5 foreign dispatches written by Milton while he filled the office of secretary, and several papers relating to the Popish Trials and the Rye House Plot. The whole was wrapped up in an envelope, superscribed, *To Mr. Skinner*, 10 *Merchant*. On examination the large manuscript proved to be the long-lost essay on the Doctrines of Christianity, which according to Wood and Toland, Milton finished after the Restoration, and deposited with Cyriac Skinner. 15

1. **Mr. Lemon**, during the early part of the present century, made important improvements in the methods of preserving public documents in England.

7. Milton was Latin secretary under Cromwell in 1649 and held this office until the Restoration.

8. **Popish Trials**. In 1678 Titus Oates accused the Catholic nobility of conspiring against the Protestants and several of them were tried and executed.

8. **Rye House Plot**. A conspiracy on the part of some Whigs to assassinate Charles II.

10. **Mr. Skinner**. Milton's pupil and friend. To him he dedicated the beautiful sonnet on the loss of his sight.

Skinner, it is well known, held the same political opinions with his illustrious friend. It is therefore probable, as Mr. Lemon conjectures, that he may have fallen under the
5 suspicions of the government during that persecution of the Whigs which followed the dissolution of the Oxford Parliament; and that, in consequence of a general seizure of his papers, this work may have been brought to
10 the office in which it has been found. But whatever the adventures of the manuscript may have been, no doubt can exist that it is a genuine relic of the great poet.

Mr. Sumner, who was commanded by his
15 Majesty to edit and translate the treatise, has acquitted himself of his task in a manner honorable to his talents and to his character. His version is not, indeed, very easy or elegant; but it is entitled to the praise of
20 clearness and fidelity. His notes abound with interesting quotations, and have the rare merit of really elucidating the text. The preface is evidently the work of a sensible and candid man, firm in his own religious opinions, and
25 tolerant towards those of others.

6. **Whigs.** A political party devoted to the cause of popular rights.

7. **Oxford Parliament.** In 1681 Parliament met at Oxford that the commons might not be influenced by the factious citizens of London.

The book itself will not add much to the fame of Milton. It is, like all his Latin works, well written, though not exactly in the style of the prize essays of Oxford and Cambridge. There is no elaborate imitation of classical antiquity, no scrupulous purity, none of the ceremonial cleanness which characterizes the diction of our academical Pharisees. The author does not attempt to polish and brighten his composition into the Ciceronian gloss and brilliancy. He does not, in short, sacrifice sense and spirit to pedantic refinements. The nature of his subject compelled him to use many words

“That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.” 15

But he writes with as much ease and freedom as if Latin were his mother tongue; and, where he is least happy, his failure seems to arise from the carelessness of a native, not from the ignorance of a foreigner. We may apply to him what Denham with great felicity says of Cowley. He wears the garb, but not the clothes, of the ancients.

10. **Marcus Tullius Cicero**, (106-43 B.C.) A Roman orator noted for the elegance of his style.

15. **Quintilian**, (A.D. 35-96.) A famous Roman critic who wrote a complete treatise on rhetoric and oratory. The line is from Milton's eleventh sonnet.

21. **Denham and Cowley**. Both noted poets of the first half of the seventeenth century.

Throughout the volume are discernible the traces of a powerful and independent mind, emancipated from the influence of authority, and devoted to the search of truth. Milton
5 professes to form his system from the Bible alone; and his digest of scriptural texts is certainly among the best that have appeared. But he is not always so happy in his inferences as in his citations.

10 Some of the heterodox doctrines which he avows seem to have excited considerable amazement, particularly his Arianism, and his theory on the subject of polygamy. Yet we can scarcely conceive that any person
15 could have read the "Paradise Lost" without suspecting him of the former; nor do we think that any reader, acquainted with the history of his life, ought to be much startled at the latter. The opinions which he has expressed
20 respecting the nature of the Deity, the eternity of matter, and the observation of the Sabbath, might, we think, have caused more just surprise.

But we will not go into the discussion of
25 these points. The book, were it far more orthodox or far more heretical than it is,

12. **Arianism.** A theological system originating with Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, denying the doctrine of the Trinity.

would not much edify or corrupt the present generation. The men of our time are not to be converted or perverted by quartos. A few more days and this essay will follow the "Defensio Populi" to the dust and silence of ⁵ the upper shelf. The name of its author, and the remarkable circumstances attending its publication, will secure to it a certain degree of attention. For a month or two it will occupy a few minutes of chat in every drawing-¹⁰ room, and a few columns in every magazine; and it will then, to borrow the elegant language of the playbills, be withdrawn to make room for the forthcoming novelties.

We wish, however, to avail ourselves of the ¹⁵ interest, transient as it may be, which this work has excited. The dexterous Capuchins never choose to preach on the life and miracles of a saint till they have awakened the devotional feelings of their auditors by ²⁰ exhibiting some relic of him,—a thread of his garment, a lock of his hair, or a drop of his

3. **quartos.** Books in which the leaves are folded twice, making four leaves.

5. **Defensio Populi.** An answer to Salmasius's "Defence of the King," attempting to justify the execution of Charles I. It was in writing this pamphlet that Milton brought on his blindness.

17. **Capuchins.** A branch of the Franciscan order of monks in Italy, so called from the *capuche*, or cowl, worn in imitation of St. Francis. They lived entirely by begging.

blood. On the same principle, we intend to take advantage of the late interesting discovery, and, while this memorial of a great and good man is still in the hands of all, to
5 say something of his moral and intellectual qualities. Nor, we are convinced, will the severest of our readers blame us if, on an occasion like the present, we turn for a short time from the topics of the day, to commemorate, in all love and reverence, the genius and
10 virtues of John Milton, the poet, the statesman, the philosopher, the glory of English literature, the champion and the martyr of English liberty.

15 It is by his poetry that Milton is best known; and it is of his poetry that we wish first to speak. By the general suffrage of the civilized world, his place has been assigned among the greatest masters of the art. His
20 detractors, however, though outvoted, have not been silenced. There are many critics, and some of great name, who contrive in the same breath to extol the poems and to decry the poet. The works they acknowledge,
25 considered in themselves, may be classed among the noblest productions of the human mind. But they will not allow the author to

rank with those great men, who, born in the infancy of civilization, supplied by their own powers the want of instruction; and, though destitute of models themselves, bequeathed to posterity models which defy imitation. Milton, ⁵ it is said, inherited what his predecessors created; he lived in an enlightened age; he received a finished education; and we must, therefore, if we would form a just estimate of his powers, make large deductions in consider- ¹⁰ ation of these advantages.

We venture to say, on the contrary, paradoxical as the remark may appear, that no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavorable circumstances than Milton. He ¹⁵ doubted, as he has himself owned, whether he had not been born "an age too late." For this notion Johnson has thought fit to make him the butt of much clumsy ridicule. The poet, we believe, understood the nature of his ²⁰ art better than the critic. He knew that his poetical genius derived no advantage from the civilization which surrounded him, or from the learning which he had acquired; and he looked back with something like regret to the ²⁵

17. "Paradise Lost," Book IX. line 44.

18. Dr. Samuel Johnson, (1709-84.) One of the most famous names in literature in the eighteenth century. His "Life of Milton" is colored by his Tory prejudices.

runder age of simple words and vivid impressions.

We think that as civilization advances poetry almost necessarily declines. Therefore, though we fervently admire those great works of imagination which have appeared in dark ages, we do not admire them the more because they have appeared in dark ages. On the contrary, we hold that the most
10 wonderful and splendid proof of genius is a great poem produced in a civilized age. We cannot understand why those who believe in that most orthodox article of literary faith, that the earliest poets are generally the best,
15 should wonder at the rule as if it were the exception. Surely, the uniformity of the phenomenon indicates a corresponding uniformity in the cause.

The fact is, that common observers reason
20 from the progress of the experimental sciences to that of the imitative arts. The improvement of the former is gradual and slow. Ages are spent in collecting materials, ages more in separating and combining them. Even when
25 a system has been formed, there is still something to add, to alter, or to reject. Every generation enjoys the use of a vast hoard

bequeathed to it by antiquity, and transmits that hoard, augmented by fresh acquisitions, to future ages. In these pursuits, therefore, the first speculators lie under great disadvantages, and, even when they fail, are entitled to 5 praise. Their pupils, with far inferior intellectual powers, speedily surpass them in actual attainments. Every girl who has read Mrs. Marcet's little dialogues on political economy could teach Montague or Walpole many 10 lessons in finance. Any intelligent man may now, by resolutely applying himself for a few years to mathematics, learn more than the great Newton knew after half a century of study and meditation. 15

But it is not thus with music, with painting, or with sculpture. Still less is it thus with poetry. The progress of refinement rarely supplies these arts with better objects of imitation. It may indeed improve the instruments which 20 are necessary to the mechanical operations of

9. **Mrs. Marcet**, (1769-1858.) A writer on popular science and educational subjects.

10. **Charles Montague**, (1661-1715.) As Lord Halifax he was Chancellor of the Exchequer under William III. and founder of the Bank of England.

10. **Sir Robert Walpole**, (1676-1745.) Chancellor of the Exchequer and chief minister under George I. and George II.

14. **Sir Isaac Newton**, (1642-1727.) One of the greatest of English philosophers. He discovered the law of gravitation.

the musician, the sculptor, and the painter. But language, the machine of the poet, is best fitted for his purpose in its rudest state. Nations, like individuals, first perceive and
5 then abstract. They advance from particular images to general terms. Hence the vocabulary of an enlightened society is philosophical; that of a half-civilized people is poetical.

This change in the language of men is
10 partly the cause and partly the effect of a corresponding change in the nature of their intellectual operations, of a change by which science gains and poetry loses. Generalization is necessary to the advancement of knowledge;
15 but particularity is indispensable to the creations of the imagination. In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse
20 poems. They give us vague phrases instead of images, and personified qualities instead of men. They may be better able to analyze human nature than their predecessors. But analysis is not the business of the poet. His
25 office is to portray, not to dissect. He may believe in a moral sense, like Shaftesbury; he

26. **Earl of Shaftesbury**, (1671-1713.) Chiefly noted for his book "Characteristics" maintaining that everything which is, is for the best.

may refer all human actions to self-interest, like Helvetius; or he may never think about the matter at all. His creed on such subjects will no more influence his poetry, properly so called, than the notions which a painter may ⁵ have conceived respecting the lachrymal glands, or the circulation of the blood, will affect the tears of his Niobe, or the blushes of his Aurora. If Shakespeare had written a book on the motives of human actions, it is by ¹⁰ no means certain, that it would have been a good one. It is extremely improbable that it would have contained half so much able reasoning on the subject as is to be found in the "Fable of the Bees." But could Mande- ¹⁵ ville have created an Iago? Well as he knew how to resolve characters into their elements, would he have been able to combine those elements in such a manner as to make up a man, — a real, living, individual man? ²⁰

2. **Helvetius**, (1715-1771.) A French philosopher whose chief work was ordered to be burned by the hangman. He asserted that selfishness is the chief motive in human conduct.

8. **Niobe**. A character in Greek mythology whose twelve children were slain by Diana and Apollo, and who, in consequence, wept until she became a stone.

9. **Aurora**. The goddess of the dawn.

15. **Fable of the Bees**. A work of Bernard de Mandeville (1670-1733) in which he tries to show that vice and luxury benefit society.

16. **Iago**. A character in "Othello" and one of Shakespeare's most wonderful creations.

Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind, if anything which gives so much pleasure ought to be called unsoundness. By
5 poetry we mean not all writing in verse, nor even all good writing in verse. Our definition excludes many metrical compositions which, on other grounds, deserve the highest praise. By poetry we mean the art of employing
10 words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of colors. Thus the greatest of poets has described it, in lines universally admired
15 for the vigor and felicity of their diction, and still more valuable on account of the just notion which they convey of the art in which he excelled: —

20 “ As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”

These are the fruits of the “fine frenzy” which he ascribes to the poet, — a fine frenzy,
25 doubtless, but still a frenzy. Truth, indeed, is essential to poetry; but it is the truth of madness. The reasonings are just; but the

premises are false. After the first suppositions have been made, everything ought to be consistent; but those first suppositions require a degree of credulity which almost amounts to a partial and temporary derangement of the intellect. Hence of all people children are the most imaginative. They abandon themselves without reserve to every illusion. Every image which is strongly presented to their mental eye produces on them the effect of reality. No man, whatever his sensibility may be, is ever effected by Hamlet or Lear as a little girl is affected by the story of poor Red Ridinghood. She knows that it is all false, that wolves cannot speak, that there are no wolves in England. Yet in spite of her knowledge she believes; she weeps; she trembles; she dares not go into a dark room lest she should feel the teeth of the monster at her throat. Such is the despotism of the imagination over uncultivated minds.

In a rude state of society men are children with a greater variety of ideas. It is therefore in such a state of society that we may expect to find the poetical temperament in its highest perfection. In an enlightened age, there will be much intelligence, much science, much

his works do not resemble a lisping man or a modern ruin. We have seen in our own time great talents, intense labor, and long meditation employed in this struggle against the spirit of the age, and employed, we will not say absolutely in vain, but with dubious success and feeble applause.

If these reasonings be just, no poet has ever triumphed over greater difficulties than Milton. He received a learned education; he was a profound and elegant classical scholar; he had studied all the mysteries of Rabbinical literature; he was intimately acquainted with every language of modern Europe from which either pleasure or information was then to be derived. He was perhaps the only great poet of later times who has been distinguished by the excellence of his Latin verse. The genius of Petrarch was scarcely of the first order; and his poems in the ancient language, though much praised by those who have never read them, are wretched compositions. Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination; nor indeed do we think

7. This is probably a reference to the poet Wordsworth.

12. Rabbinical literature. The writings of the Hebrew law-givers or *rabbis*.

19. Petrarch, 1304-1374.¹ One of the greatest of Italian poets, especially celebrated for his very beautiful lyrics.

his classical diction comparable to that of Milton. The authority of Johnson is against us on this point. But Johnson had studied the bad writers of the middle ages till he had become utterly insensible to the Augustan⁵ elegance, and was as ill qualified to judge between two Latin styles as a habitual drunkard to set up for a wine taster.

Versification in a dead language is an exotic, a far-fetched, costly, sickly imitation of¹⁰ that which elsewhere may be found in healthful and spontaneous perfection. The soils on which this rarity flourishes are in general as ill suited to the production of vigorous native poetry as the flowerpots of a¹⁵ hothouse to the growth of oaks. That the author of the "Paradise Lost" should have written the "Epistle to Manso" was truly wonderful. Never before were such marked originality and such exquisite mimicry found²⁰ together. Indeed, in all the Latin poems of Milton, the artificial manner indispensable to such works is admirably preserved, while, at the same time, his genius gives to them a

5. **Augustan.** The reign of the first Roman Emperor Augustus (63 B.C.-14 A.D.) was called the Golden Age in literature. Horace, Vergil and Ovid were then at the height of their powers.

18. **Epistle to Manso.** A Latin poem written by Milton when he was in Italy.

peculiar charm, an air of nobleness and freedom, which distinguishes them from all other writings of the same class. They remind us of the amusements of those angelic warriors who composed the cohort of Gabriel: —

“ About him exercised heroic games
The unarmed youth of heaven; but nigh at hand
Celestial armory, shields, helms, and spears,
Hung high, with diamonds flaming and with gold.”

10 We cannot look upon the sportive exercises for which the genius of Milton ungirds itself, without catching a glimpse of the gorgeous and terrible panoply which it is accustomed to wear. The strength of his imagination
15 triumphed over every obstacle. So intense and ardent was the fire of his mind, that it not only was not suffocated beneath the weight of fuel, but penetrated the whole superincumbent mass with its own heat and radiance.

20 It is not our intention to attempt anything like a complete examination of the poetry of Milton. The public has long been agreed as to the merit of the most remarkable passages, the incomparable harmony of the numbers,
25 and the excellence of that style which no rival has been able to equal and no parodist to

degrade, which displays in their highest perfection the idiomatic powers of the English tongue, and to which every ancient and every modern language has contributed something of grace, of energy, or of music. In the vast⁵ field of criticism on which we are entering, innumerable reapers have already put their sickles. Yet the harvest is so abundant that the negligent search of a straggling gleaner may be rewarded with a sheaf. 10

The most striking characteristic of the poetry of Milton is the extreme remoteness of the associations by means of which it acts on the reader. Its effect is produced, not so much by what it expresses, as by what it¹⁵ suggests; not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them. He electrifies the mind through conductors. The most unimaginative man must understand the Iliad. Homer gives²⁰ him no choice, and requires from him no exertion, but takes the whole upon himself, and sets the images in so clear a light that it is impossible to be blind to them. The works of Milton cannot be comprehended or enjoyed²⁵ unless the mind of the reader co-operate with that of the writer. He does not paint a

finished picture or play for a mere passive listener. He sketches, and leaves others to fill up the outline. He strikes the keynote, and expects his hearers to make out the
5 melody.

We often hear of the magical influence of poetry. The expression in general means nothing; but, applied to the writings of Milton, it is most appropriate. His poetry
10 acts like an incantation. Its merit lies less in its obvious meaning than in its occult power. There would seem, at first sight, to be no more in his words than in other words. But they are words of enchantment. No sooner
15 are they pronounced, than the past is present and the distant near. New forms of beauty start at once into existence, and all the burial places of the memory give up their dead. Change the structure of the sentence; substitute one synonym for another, and the whole
20 effect is destroyed. The spell loses its power; and he who should then hope to conjure with it would find himself as much mistaken as Cassim in the Arabian tale, when he stood
25 crying, "Open Wheat," "Open Barley," to the door which obeyed no sound but "Open

^{24.} Cassim. A character in the "Arabians Nights Tale of the Forty Thieves."

Sesame." The miserable failure of Dryden in his attempt to translate into his own diction some parts of the "Paradise Lost" is a remarkable instance of this.

In support of these observations we may⁵ remark, that scarcely any passages in the poems of Milton are more generally known, or more frequently repeated, than those which are little more than muster rolls of names. They are not always more appropriate or¹⁰ more melodious than other names. But they are charmed names. Every one of them is the first link in a long chain of associated ideas. Like the dwelling place of our infancy revisited in manhood, like the song of our¹⁵ country heard in a strange land, they produce upon us an effect wholly independent of their intrinsic value. One transports us back to a remote period of history. Another places us among the novel scenes and manners of a²⁰ distant region. A third evokes all the dear classical recollections of childhood,—the schoolroom, the dog-eared Vergil, the holiday,

1. **Open Sesame.** An Indian grain. The name is used in the same tale as a password to the robbers' cave.

1. **John Dryden,** (1631-1700.) One of the most celebrated poets of the seventh century. He wrote a sacred opera based on the "Paradise Lost" entitled the "State of Innocence."

9. "Paradise Lost," Book I., line 39.

and the prize. A fourth brings before us the splendid phantoms of chivalrous romance, — the trophied lists, the embroidered housings, the quaint devices, the haunted forests, the
 5 enchanted gardens, the achievements of enamored knights, and the smiles of rescued princesses.

In none of the works of Milton is his peculiar manner more happily displayed than
 10 in the "Allegro" and the "Penseroso." It is impossible to conceive that the mechanism of language can be brought to a more exquisite degree of perfection. These poems differ from others as otter of roses differs from
 15 ordinary rose water, the close-packed essence from the thin, diluted mixture. They are, indeed, not so much poems as collections of hints, from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself. Every epithet
 20 is a text for a stanza.

The "Comus" and the "Samson Agonistes" are works which, though of very different merit, offer some marked points of resemblance. Both are lyric poems in the
 25 form of plays. There are, perhaps, no two

10. *Allegro* and *Penseroso* are two Italian words meaning *mirthful* and *melancholy*. They are among the earliest and most beautiful of Milton's poems.

kinds of composition so essentially dissimilar as the drama and the ode. The business of the dramatist is to keep himself out of sight, and to let nothing appear but his characters. As soon as he attracts notice to his personal feelings, the illusion is broken. The effect is as unpleasant as that which is produced on the stage by the voice of the prompter or the entrance of a scene-shifter. Hence it was that the tragedies of Byron were his least successful performances. They resemble those pasteboard pictures invented by the friend of children, Mr. Newberry, in which a single movable head goes round twenty different bodies, so that the same face looks out upon us, successively, from the uniform of a hussar, the furs of a judge, and the rags of a beggar. In all the characters, — patriots and tyrants, haters and lovers, — the frown and sneer of Harold were discernible in an instant. But this species of egotism, though fatal to the drama, is the inspiration of the ode. It is the part of the lyric poet to abandon himself, without reserve, to his own emotions.

13. **Mr. Newberry.** A publisher of children's books. Goldsmith was one of his writers and mentions him in the "Vicar of Wakefield."

20. **Childe Harold.** The most famous of Byron's poems; describes the scenes through which the poet passed in his travels.

Between these hostile elements many great men have endeavored to affect an amalgamation, but never with complete success. The Greek drama, on the model of which the
5 "Samson" was written, sprang from the ode. The dialogue was ingrafted on the chorus, and naturally partook of its character. The genius of the greatest of the Athenian dramatists co-operated with the circumstances under
10 which tragedy made its first appearance. Æschylus was, head and heart, a lyric poet. In his time the Greeks had far more intercourse with the East than in the days of Homer; and they had not yet acquired that
15 immense superiority in war, in science, and in the arts, which, in the following generation, led them to treat the Asiatics with contempt. From the narrative of Herodotus it should seem that they still looked up, with the
20 veneration of disciples, to Egypt and Assyria. At this period, accordingly, it was natural that the literature of Greece should be tinctured with the Oriental style. And that style, we

11. Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were the three great Greek writers of tragedy and lived in the fifth century B.C. Only a few of their dramas survive.

18. Herodotus, (484 B.C.) The earliest of Greek historians and often called the "father of history." He wrote an account of the Persian wars.

think, is discernible in the works of Pindar and Æschylus. The latter often reminds us of the Hebrew writers. The Book of Job, indeed, in conduct and diction, bears a considerable resemblance to some of his⁵ dramas. Considered as plays, his works are absurd; considered as choruses, they are above all praise. If, for instance, we examine the address of Clytemnestra to Agamemnon on his return, or the description of the seven¹⁰ Argive chiefs, by the principles of dramatic writing, we shall instantly condemn them as monstrous. But if we forget the characters, and think only of the poetry, we shall admit that it has never been surpassed in energy¹⁵ and magnificence. Sophocles made the Greek drama as dramatic as was consistent with its original form. His portraits of men have a sort of similarity; but it is the similarity not of a painting, but of a bas-relief.²⁰ It suggests a resemblance; but it does not produce an illusion. Euripides attempted to carry the reform further. But it was a task

1. **Pindar**, (520 B.C.) The earliest and greatest Greek lyric poet.

9. **Agamemnon**. A tragedy of Æschylus. Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, slew him on his return from Troy.

11. **Argive chiefs**. The seven princes who made war upon Thebes described in another drama of Æschylus.

far beyond his powers, perhaps beyond any powers. Instead of correcting what was bad, he destroyed what was excellent. He substituted crutches for stilts, bad sermons for
 5 good odes.

Milton, it is well known, admired Euripides highly; much more highly than, in our opinion, Euripides deserved. Indeed, the caresses which this partiality leads our countrymen
 10 to bestow on "sad Electra's poet," sometimes remind us of the beautiful Queen of Fairyland kissing the long ears of Bottom. At all events, there can be no doubt that this veneration for the Athenian, whether just or not, was injuri-
 15 ous to the "Samson Agonistes." Had Milton taken Æschylus for his model, he would have given himself up to the lyric inspiration, and poured out profusely all the treasures of his mind, without bestowing a thought on those
 20 dramatic properties which the nature of the work rendered it impossible to preserve. In the attempt to reconcile things in their own nature inconsistent, he has failed, as every one else must have failed. We cannot identify

10. **Electra's poet.** Euripides. Electra is the heroine of one of his plays.

12. **Bottom.** The clown in "Midsummer Night's Dream." In act III. scene I., Oberon, king of the fairies, first disguises him with an ass's head and then causes his queen, Titania, to fall in love with him.

ourselves with the characters, as in a good play. We cannot identify ourselves with the poet, as in a good ode. The conflicting ingredients, like an acid and an alkali mixed, neutralize each other. We are by no means ⁵ insensible to the merits of this celebrated piece, to the severe dignity of the style, the graceful and pathetic solemnity of the opening speech, or the wild and barbaric melody which gives so striking an effect to the choral passages. ¹⁰ But we think it, we confess, the least successful effort of the genius of Milton.

The "Comus" is framed on the model of the Italian masque, as the "Samson" is framed on the model of the Greek tragedy. It is ¹⁵ certainly the noblest performance of the kind which exists in any language. It is as far superior to the "Faithful Shepherdess" as the "Faithful Shepherdess" is to the "Aminta," or the "Aminta" to the "Pastor Fido." It ²⁰ was well for Milton that he had here no Euripides to mislead him. He understood and loved the literature of modern Italy. But he did not feel for it the same veneration

14. **Masque.** A dramatic entertainment originating in Italy and acted by imaginary or allegorical personages. It was very popular in England during the latter part of the sixteenth century.

20. "**Faithful Shepherdess**," "**Aminta**," and "**Pastor Fido**." All pastoral dramas; the first by John Fletcher, the other two by the Italian poets, Tasso and Guarini.

which he entertained for the remains of Athenian and Roman poetry, consecrated by so many lofty and endearing recollections. The faults, moreover, of his Italian predecessors were of a kind to which his mind had a deadly antipathy. He could stoop to a plain style, sometimes even to a bald style; but false brilliancy was his utter aversion. His Muse had no objection to a russet attire; but she turned with disgust from the finery of Guarini, as tawdry and as paltry as the rags of a chimney sweeper on May Day. Whatever ornaments she wears are of massive gold, not only dazzling to the sight, but capable of standing the severest test of the crucible.

Milton attended in the "Comus" to the distinction which he afterwards neglected in the "Samson." He made his masque what it ought to be, essentially lyrical, and dramatic only in semblance. He has not attempted a fruitless struggle against a defect inherent in the nature of that species of composition; and he has therefore succeeded, wherever success was not impossible. The speeches must be read as majestic soliloquies; and he who so reads them will be enraptured with their

12. The chimney sweeps in England celebrated the first of May by parading in fantastic costumes.

eloquence, their sublimity, and their music. The interruptions of the dialogue, however, impose a constraint upon the writer, and break the illusion of the reader. The finest passages are those which are lyric in form as well as in spirit. "I should much commend," says the excellent Sir Henry Wotton in a letter to Milton, "the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto, I must¹⁰ plainly confess to you, I have seen yet nothing parallel in our language." The criticism was just. It is when Milton escapes from the shackles of the dialogue, when he is discharged from the labor of uniting two incongruous¹⁵ styles, when he is at liberty to indulge his choral raptures without reserve, that he rises even above himself. Then, like his own Good Genius bursting from the earthly form and weeds of Thyrsis, he stands forth in celestial²⁰ freedom; he seems to cry exultingly,—

"Now' my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run,"

7. **Sir Henry Wotton**, (1568-1639.) A scholar and poet and provost of Eton College.

9. **Dorique.** The Greek dialect of Sicily in which the exquisite pastoral poems of Theocritus were written.

20. **Thyrsis.** An attending spirit in "Comus" who assumes the disguise of a shepherd. Thyrsis was a favorite name for shepherds in the old classic pastorals.

23. "Comus," lines 1012, 1013.

to skim the earth, to soar above the clouds, to bathe in the elysian dew of the rainbow, and to inhale the balmy smells of nard and cassia, which the musky winds of the zephyr scatter
5 through the cedared alleys of the Hesperides.

There are several of the minor poems of Milton on which we would willingly make a few remarks. Still more willingly would we enter into a detailed examination of that
10 admirable poem, the "Paradise Regained," which, strangely enough, is scarcely ever mentioned except as an instance of the blindness of the parental affection which men of letters bear towards the offspring of their
15 intellects. That Milton was mistaken in preferring this work, excellent as it is, to the "Paradise Lost," we readily admit. But we are sure that the superiority of the "Paradise Lost" to the "Paradise Regained" is not more
20 decided than the superiority of the "Paradise Regained" to every poem which has since made its appearance. Our limits, however, prevent us from discussing the point at length. We hasten on to that extraordinary production

2. **Elysian.** The Elysian Fields were the place of abode for the blessed spirits in Hades.

5. **Hesperides.** The daughters of Hesperus and Atlas. They guarded the golden apples in the garden of the gods which lay on the extreme verge of the western ocean where day and night meet.

which the general suffrage of critics has placed in the highest class of human compositions.

The only poem of modern times which can be compared with "Paradise Lost" is the "Divine Comedy." The subject of Milton, in some points, resembled that of Dante; but he has treated it in a widely different manner. We cannot, we think, better illustrate our opinion respecting our own great poet, than by contrasting him with the father of Tuscan literature.

The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante as the hieroglyphics of Egypt differed from the picture writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves; they stand simply for what they are. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible only to the initiated. Their value depends less on what they directly represent than on what they remotely suggest. However strange, however grotesque, may be the

5. "Divine Comedy" The great epic of Mediæval Christianity and the work of the greatest of Italian poets, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321.) He was a Florentine by birth but was banished for political reasons and died in exile. The poem describes his journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise.

10. **Tuscany.** The province of Italy in which Florence is situated.

13. **Hieroglyphic.** In the Egyptian picture-writing each picture was used as a symbol for a letter or syllable, while in other countries where this form of writing was used, the picture merely denoted the thing represented.

appearance which Dante undertakes to describe he never shrinks from describing it. He gives us the shape, the color, the sound, the smell, the taste; he counts the numbers; he
 5 measures the size. His similes are the illustrations of a traveller. Unlike those of other poets, and especially of Milton, they are introduced in a plain, business-like manner; not for the sake of any beauty in the objects
 10 from which they are drawn; not for the sake of any ornament which they may impart to the poem; but simply in order to make the meaning of the writer as clear to the reader as it is to himself. The ruins of the precipice
 15 which led from the sixth to the seventh circle of hell were like those of the rock which fell into the Adige on the south of Trent. The cataract of Phlegethon was like that of Aqua Cheta at the monastery of St. Benedict. The
 20 place where the heretics were confined in burning tombs resembled the vast cemetery of Arles.

17. **Adige.** A river of northern Italy on which the city of Trent is situated.

18. **Phlegethon.** A river of fire, one of the streams of Hades.

19. **St. Benedict,** (A.D. 480.) The founder of Monasticism in the western world. His monastery was near Naples on Monte Cassino.

22 **Arles.** A city of Provence in France celebrated for its remains of the Roman occupation.

Now let us compare with the exact details of Dante the dim intimations of Milton. We will cite a few examples. The English poet had never thought of taking the measure of Satan. He gives us merely a vague idea of vast bulk. In one passage the fiend lies stretched out, huge in length, floating many a fathom, equal in size to the earthborn enemies of Jove, or to the sea monster which the mariner mistakes for an island. When he addresses himself to battle against the guardian angels, he stands like Teneriffe or Atlas: his stature reaches the sky. Contrast with these descriptions the lines in which Dante has described the gigantic specter of Nimrod.¹⁵ 'His face seemed to me as long and as broad as the ball of St. Peter's at Rome; and his other limbs were in proportion; so that the cloak, which concealed him from the waist downwards, nevertheless showed so much of him, that three tall Germans would in vain have attempted to reach to his hair.'" We are sensible that we do no justice to the admirable style of the Florentine poet. But Mr. Cary's

¹² **Teneriffe.** A volcano on an island off the African coast. "Paradise Lost," Book I., lines 192-208.

Atlas. A chain of lofty mountains in Northern Africa.

¹⁵ **Nimrod.** A mighty hunter and reputed founder of the Assyrian Empire. Gen. X., 8-12.

translation is not at hand; and our version, however rude, is sufficient to illustrate our meaning.

Once more, compare the lazar house in the eleventh book of the "Paradise Lost" with the last ward of Malebolge in Dante. Milton avoids the loathsome details, and takes refuge in indistinct but solemn and tremendous imagery: Despair hurrying from couch to couch to mock the wretches with his attendance; Death shaking his dart over them, but, in spite of supplications, delaying to strike. What says Dante? "There was such a moan there as there would be if all the sick who, between July and September, are in the hospitals of Valdichiana, and of the Tuscan swamps, and of Sardinia, were in one pit together; and such a stench was issuing forth as is wont to issue from decayed limbs."

We will not take upon ourselves the invidious office of settling precedency between two such writers. Each in his own department is incomparable; and each, we may

4. **Lazar house.** Lazar is derived from *Lazarus*, meaning leper, and is used here for hospital.

6. **Malebolge.** The eighth circle of Hell in Dante's "Inferno." It was a deep gulf surrounded by ten pits, the abode of the forgers and liars.

16. **Valdichiana.** A region of Tuscany formerly swampy and unhealthy.

remark, has wisely, or fortunately, taken a subject adapted to exhibit his peculiar talent to the greatest advantage. The "Divine Comedy" is a personal narrative. Dante is the eye-witness and ear-witness of that which⁵ he relates. He is the very man who has heard the tormented spirits crying out for the second death; who has read the dusky characters on the portal within which there is no hope; who has hidden his face from the terrors of the¹⁰ Gorgon; who has fled from the hooks and the seething pitch of Barbariccia and Draghignazzo. His own hands have grasped the shaggy sides of Lucifer. His own feet have climbed the mountain of expiation. His own¹⁵ brow has been marked by the purifying angel. The reader would throw aside such a tale in incredulous disgust, unless it were told with the strongest air of veracity; with a sobriety even in its horrors; with the greatest precision²⁰

7. **second death.** The death of the soul. "Inferno," Book I., line 117.

8. Over the portal of Hell were inscribed the words, "*Lasciate ogni Speranza, voi ch'entrate*," "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." "Inferno," Book III., line 9.

11. **Gorgon.** Medusa, one of the three sisters with the snaky locks who turned to stone all who looked upon her.

13. **Barbariccia and Draghignazzo.** Names of fiends in the "Inferno."

14. **Lucifer.** A name given to Satan.

15. **Mountain of expiation.** Purgatory

and multiplicity in its details. The narrative of Milton in this respect differs from that of Dante, as the adventures of Amadis differ from those of Gulliver. The author of
5 "Amadis" would have made his book ridiculous if he had introduced those minute particulars which give such a charm to the work of Swift; the nautical observations, the affected delicacy about names, the official
10 documents transcribed at full length, and all the unmeaning gossip and scandal of the court, springing out of nothing, and tending to nothing. We are not shocked at being told that a man who lived, nobody knows
15 when, saw many very strange sights, and we can easily abandon ourselves to the illusion of the romance. But when Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, resident at Rotherhithe, tells us of pygmies and giants, flying islands, and phil-
20 osophizing horses, nothing but such circumstantial touches could produce for a single moment a deception on the imagination.

Of all the poets who have introduced into their works the agency of supernatural beings,

3. **Amadis.** Hero of the legendary romance of chivalry, "Amadis of Gaul," written by a Portuguese in the fourteenth century.

4. **Gulliver.** Hero of "Gulliver's Travels," a romance by Dean Swift (1667-1745) and a bitter satire on English social and political life.

Milton has succeeded best. Here Dante decidedly yields to him; and as this is a point on which many rash and ill-considered judgments have been pronounced, we feel inclined to dwell on it a little longer. The most fatal ⁵ error which a poet can possibly commit in the management of his machinery is that of attempting to philosophize too much. Milton has often been censured for ascribing to spirits many functions of which spirits must be ¹⁰ incapable. But these objections, though sanctioned by eminent names, originate, we venture to say, in profound ignorance of the art of poetry.

What is spirit? What are our own minds, ¹⁵ the portion of spirit with which we are best acquainted? We observe certain phenomena. We cannot explain them into material causes. We therefore infer that there exists something which is not material. But of this something ²⁰ we have no idea. We can define it only by negatives. We can reason about it only by symbols. We use the word, but we have no image of the thing; and the business of poetry is with images, and not with words. ²⁵ The poet uses words indeed; but they are merely the instruments of his art, not its

objects. They are the materials which he is to dispose in such a manner as to present a picture to the mental eye. And if they are not so disposed, they are no more entitled to
5 be called poetry than a bale of canvas and a box of colors to be called a painting.

Logicians may reason about abstractions. But the great mass of men must have images. The strong tendency of the multitude in all
10 ages and nations to idolatry can be explained on no other principle. The first inhabitants of Greece, there is reason to believe, worshipped one invisible Deity. But the necessity of having something more definite to adore
15 produced, in a few centuries, the innumerable crowd of gods and goddesses. In like manner the ancient Persians thought it impious to exhibit the Creator under a human form. Yet even these transferred to the sun the worship
20 which, in speculation, they considered due only to the Supreme Mind. The history of the Jews is the record of a continued struggle between pure Theism, supported by the most terrible sanctions, and the strangely fascinating desire

13. This statement is a very doubtful one.

17. **Zoroaster**, the great Persian prophet, taught that there were two creative spirits, one good, the other evil, but that the good would ultimately prevail.

of having some visible and tangible object of adoration. Perhaps none of the secondary causes which Gibbon has assigned for the rapidity with which Christianity spread over the world, while Judaism scarcely ever acquired a proselyte, operated more powerfully than this feeling. God, the uncreated, the incomprehensible, the invisible, attracted few worshippers. A philosopher might admire so noble a conception; but the crowd turned away in disgust from words which presented no image to their minds. It was before Deity, embodied in a human form, walking among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross, that the prejudices of the Synagogue, and the doubts of the Academy, and the pride of the Portico, and the fasces of the Lictor, and the swords of the thirty legions, were humbled

3. **Edward Gibbon**, (1737-1794.) An eminent English historian, author of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

17. **Synagogue.** The Jewish place of worship, but used here to denote the Jews as a race.

18. **Academy.** A garden in Athens where Plato taught his disciples. Hence his philosophy received the name of *Academic*.

19. **Portico.** A porch in Athens where Zeno, the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, used to teach.

19. **Lictor.** A Roman officer who attended the magistrates and carried as a badge of authority a bundle of rods called *fasces*. The expression is here used as a symbol of the Roman Empire.

in the dust. Soon after Christianity had achieved its triumph, the principle which had assisted it began to corrupt it. It became a new paganism. Patron saints assumed the offices of household gods. St. George took the place of Mars. St. Elmo consoled the mariner for the loss of Castor and Pollux. The Virgin Mother and Cecilia succeeded to Venus and the Muses. The fascination of sex
 10 and loveliness was again joined to that of celestial dignity; and the homage of chivalry was blended with that of religion. Reformers have often made a stand against these feelings; but never with more than apparent and partial
 15 success. The men who demolished the images in cathedrals have not always been able to demolish those which were enshrined in their minds. It would not be difficult to show that in politics the same rule holds good. Doc-

5. **St. George.** The patron saint of England because of the assistance he rendered their armies in the first Crusade.

6. **Mars.** The god of war.

St Elmo. The electric light often seen about the masts of ships in a storm was called St. Elmo's fire by the Italian sailors. The Romans attributed this light to the gods, Castor and Pollux.

8. **Cecilia,** (A.D. 230.) The patroness of church music and said to have invented the organ.

9. **Muses.** The nine goddesses in Greek mythology who presided over the fine arts.

15. **The "image breakers"** or iconoclasts of the eighth century sought to abolish the use of images in church worship.

trines, we are afraid, must generally be embodied before they can excite a strong public feeling. The multitude is more easily interested for the most unmeaning badge, or the most insignificant name, than for the most 5 important principle.

From these considerations, we infer that no poet who should effect that metaphysical accuracy for the want of which Milton has been blamed, would escape a disgraceful 10 failure. Still, however, there was another extreme which, though far less dangerous, was also to be avoided. The imaginations of men are in a great measure under the control of their opinions. The most exquisite art of 15 poetical coloring can produce no illusion when it is employed to represent that which is at once perceived to be incongruous and absurd. Milton wrote in an age of philosophers and theologians. It was necessary, therefore, for 20 him to abstain from giving such a shock to their understandings as might break the charm which it was his object to throw over their imaginations. This is the real explanation of the indistinctness and inconsistency with 25 which he has often been reproached. Dr. Johnson acknowledges that it was absolutely

necessary that the spirits should be clothed with material forms. "But," says he, "the poet should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and seducing the reader to drop it from his thoughts." This is easily said; but what if Milton could not seduce his readers to drop immateriality from their thoughts? What if the contrary opinion had taken so full a possession of the minds of men as to leave no room even for the half belief which poetry requires? Such we suspect to have been the case. It was impossible for the poet to adopt altogether the material or the immaterial system. He therefore took his stand on the debatable ground. He left the whole in ambiguity. He has doubtless, by so doing, laid himself open to the charge of inconsistency. But, though philosophically in the wrong, we cannot but believe that he was poetically in the right. This task, which almost any other writer would have found impracticable, was easy to him. The peculiar art which he possessed of communicating his meaning circuitously through a long succession of associated ideas, and of intimating more than he expressed, enabled him to

disguise those incongruities which he could not avoid.

Poetry which relates to the beings of another world ought to be at once mysterious and picturesque. That of Milton is so. That of Dante is picturesque, indeed, beyond any that ever was written. Its effect approaches to that produced by the pencil or the chisel. But it is picturesque to the exclusion of all mystery. This is a fault on the right side, a fault inseparable from the plan of Dante's poem, which, as we have already observed, rendered the utmost accuracy of description necessary. Still it is a fault. The supernatural agents excite an interest; but it is not the interest which is proper to supernatural agents. We feel that we could talk to the ghosts and demons, without any emotion of unearthly awe. We could, like Don Juan, ask them to supper, and eat heartily in their company. Dante's angels are good men with wings. His devils are spiteful, ugly executioners. His dead men are merely living men in strange situations. The scene which passes between the poet and Farinata is justly

19. **Don Juan.** A legendary nobleman of Spain who sold himself to the Devil. In Mozart's opera, "Don Giovanni," he invites a statue to supper with him and the statue, much to his amazement, comes.

celebrated. Still, Farinata in the burning tomb is exactly what Farinata would have been at an *auto da fé*. Nothing can be more touching than the first interview of Dante and Beatrice. Yet what is it, but a lovely woman chiding, with sweet, austere composure, the lover for whose affection she is grateful, but whose vices she reprobates? The feelings which give the passage its charm would suit the streets of Florence as well as the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

The spirits of Milton are unlike those of almost all other writers. His fiends, in particular, are wonderful creations. They are not metaphysical abstractions. They are not wicked men. They are not ugly beasts. They have no horns, no tails, none of the fee-faw-fum of Tasso and Klopstock. They have just enough in common with human

1. Farinata. A Florentine who was condemned to Hell in the "Inferno," canto X., because he was an Epicurean.

3. *auto da fé*. A Spanish name meaning "act of faith," given to the ceremony of executing heretics by the Inquisition.

Beatrice. The woman whom Dante loved from the time he first met her when he was but nine years old. She died at twenty-four and thenceforth became for him an embodiment of divine philosophy and love. In the "Divine Comedy," she meets him in Purgatory and is his guide through Paradise.

18. Tasso, (1544-1595.) An Italian poet. His great epic, "Jerusalem Delivered," describes a council of Devils similar to that in "Paradise Lost," Book I., line 300.

18. Klopstock, (1724-1803.) A German poet who wrote an epic called the "Messiah," and other poems on Biblical subjects.

nature to be intelligible to human beings. Their characters are, like their forms, marked by a certain dim resemblance to those of men, but exaggerated to gigantic dimensions, and veiled in mysterious gloom. 5

Perhaps the gods and demons of Æschylus may best bear a comparison with the angels and devils of Milton. The style of the Athenian had, as we have remarked, something of the Oriental character; and the same pecu-
10
 liarity may be traced in his mythology. It has nothing of the amenity and elegance which we generally find in the superstitions of Greece. All is rugged, barbaric, and colossal. The legends of Æschylus seem to
15
 harmonize less with the fragrant groves and graceful porticos in which his countrymen paid their vows to the God of Light and Goddess of Desire, than with those huge and grotesque
 labyrinths of eternal granite in which Egypt
20
 enshrined her mystic Osiris, or in which Hindostan still bows down to her seven-headed idols. His favorite gods are those of the elder

6. **demon or dæmon.** Here the Greek word for spirit.

18. **God of Light.** Apollo.

19. **Goddess of Desire.** Venus.

21. **Os'ris.** The ruler of the underworld and judge of the dead.

generation, the sons of heaven and earth, compared with whom Jupiter himself was a stripling and an upstart,—the gigantic Titans, and the inexorable Furies. Foremost among his creations of this class stands Prometheus, half fiend, half redeemer, the friend of man, the sullen and implacable enemy of heaven. Prometheus bears undoubtedly a considerable resemblance to the Satan of Milton. In both we find the same impatience of control, the same ferocity, the same unconquerable pride. In both characters, also, are mingled, though in very different proportions, some kind and generous feelings. Prometheus, however, is hardly superhuman enough. He talks too much of his chains and his uneasy posture; he is rather too much depressed and agitated. His resolution seems to depend on the knowledge which he possesses that he holds the fate of his torturer in his hands, and that the hour of his release will surely come. But Satan is a creature of another sphere. The might of

3. **Titans.** A race of demigods whose authority Jupiter usurped and who made war upon him in consequence.

4. **Furies.** Divinities in the form of women who drive guilty souls to Hades.

5. **Prometheus.** A rebellious divinity who, in spite of the decree of Zeus, stole fire from Heaven in a burning ember and brought it to earth. As a punishment he was chained to one of the Caucasus mountains where an eagle daily fed upon his liver.

his intellectual nature is victorious over the extremity of pain. Amidst agonies which cannot be conceived without horror, he deliberates, resolves, and even exults. Against the sword of Michael, against the thunder of⁵ Jehovah, against the flaming lake, and the marl burning with solid fire, against the prospect of an eternity of unintermitted misery, his spirit bears up unbroken, resting on its own innate energies, requiring no support¹⁰ from anything external, nor even from hope itself.

To return for a moment to the parallel which we have been attempting to draw between Milton and Dante, we would add¹⁵ that the poetry of these great men has in a considerable degree taken its character from their moral qualities. They are not egotists. They rarely obtrude their idiosyncrasies on their readers. They have nothing in common²⁰ with those modern beggars for fame, who extort a pittance from the compassion of the inexperienced by exposing the nakedness and sores of their minds. Yet it would be difficult to name two writers whose works have been²⁵

21. **beggars for fame.** Probably referring to Lord Byron, who, Macaulay said, owed a large part of his influence to his "gloomy egotism."

more completely, though undesignedly, colored by their personal feelings.

The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of spirit; that of Dante by intensity of feeling. In every line of the "Divine Comedy" we discern the asperity which is produced by pride struggling with misery. There is perhaps no work in the world so deeply and uniformly sorrowful. The melancholy of Dante was no fantastic caprice. It was not, as far as at this distance of time can be judged, the effect of external circumstances. It was from within. Neither love nor glory, neither the conflicts of earth nor the hope of heaven, could dispel it. It turned every consolation and every pleasure into its own nature. It resembled that noxious Sardinian soil of which the intense bitterness is said to have been perceptible even in its honey. His mind was, in the noble language of the Hebrew poet, "a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and where the light was as darkness." The gloom of his character discolours all the passions of men, and all the face of nature, and tinges with its own livid hue the

18. Several Latin poets refer to this peculiarity in both Sardinia and Corsica. They ascribed the bitterness of the honey, however, to certain flowers on which the bees fed.

flowers of Paradise and the glories of the eternal throne. All the portraits of him are singularly characteristic. No person can look on the features, noble even to ruggedness, the dark furrows of the cheek, the haggard and 5 woeful stare of the eye, the sullen and contemptuous curve of the lip, and doubt that they belong to a man too proud and too sensitive to be happy.

Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a 10 lover; and, like Dante, he had been unfortunate in ambition and in love. He had survived his health and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men by whom he had been 15 distinguished at his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come; some had carried into foreign climates their unconquerable hatred of oppression; some were pining in dungeons; and some had 20 poured forth their blood on scaffolds. Venal and licentious scribblers, with just sufficient talent to clothe the thoughts of a pander in the style of a bell-man, were now the favorite writers of the sovereign and of the public. It 25 was a loathsome herd, which could be com-

pared to nothing so fitly as to the rabble of
"Comus," grotesque monsters, half bestial,
half human, dropping with wine, bloated with
gluttony, and reeling in obscene dances.
5 Amidst these that fair Muse was placed, like
the chaste lady of the masque, lofty, spotless,
and serene, to be chattered at, and pointed at,
and grinned at, by the whole rout of satyrs
and goblins. If ever despondency and asperity
10 could be excused in any man, they might have
been excused in Milton. But the strength of
his mind overcame every calamity. Neither
blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor
domestic afflictions, nor political disappoint-
15 ments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect,
had power to disturb his sedate and majes-
tic patience. His spirits do not seem to have
been high, but they were singularly equable.
His temper was serious, perhaps stern; but it
20 was a temper which no sufferings could render
sullen or fretful. Such as it was when, on the
eve of great events, he returned from his
travels, in the prime of health and manly
beauty, loaded with literary distinctions, and
25 glowing with patriotic hopes; such it con-
tinued to be when, after having experienced
every calamity which is incident to our nature,

old, poor, sightless, and disgraced, he retired to his hovel to die.

Hence it was that, though he wrote "Paradise Lost" at a time of life when images of beauty and tenderness are in general beginning to fade, even from those minds in which they have not been effaced by anxiety and disappointment, he adorned it with all that is most lovely and delightful in the physical and in the moral world. Neither Theocritus nor Ariosto had a finer or more healthful sense of the pleasantness of external objects, or loved better to luxuriate amidst sunbeams and flowers, the songs of nightingales, the juice of summer fruits, and the coolness of shady fountains. His conception of love unites all the voluptuousness of the Oriental harem, and all the gallantry of the chivalric tournament, with all the pure and quiet affection of an English fireside. His poetry reminds us of the miracles of Alpine scenery. Nooks and dells, beautiful as fairyland, are embosomed in its most rugged and gigantic elevations. The roses and myrtles bloom unchilled on the verge of the avalanche.

10. **Theocritus** A Greek poet of the third century B.C., whose pastorals are still the most beautiful poems of their kind in any language.

10. **Ariosto**, (1474-1533.) An Italian poet of wonderful grace and charm of style. "Orlando Furioso," a story of chivalry, is his chief work.

Traces, indeed, of the peculiar character of Milton may be found in all his works; but it is most strongly displayed in the Sonnets. Those remarkable poems have been under-
 5 valued by critics who have not understood their nature. They have no epigrammatic point. There is none of the ingenuity of Filicaja in the thought, none of the hard and brilliant enamel of Petrarch in the style.
 10 They are simple but majestic records of the feelings of the poet; as little tricked out for the public eye as his diary would have been. A victory, an expected attack upon the city, a momentary fit of depression or exultation, a
 15 jest thrown out against one of his books, a dream which for a short time restored to him that beautiful face over which the grave had closed forever, led him to musings which, without effort, shaped themselves into verse.
 20 The unity of sentiment and severity of style which characterize these little pieces remind us of the Greek Anthology, or perhaps still more of the Collects of the English Liturgy.

8. Filicaja, (1642-1707.) An Italian lyric poet and jurist. His sonnet to Italy was translated by Byron and inserted in the fourth canto of "Childe Harold" in the lines beginning, "Italia, O Italia"

22. Anthology. From two Greek words meaning *flower gathering*. A collection of the "flowers" of Greek poetry dating from 100 B.C., and continued to the fourteenth century.

23. Collect. A short prayer and lesson adapted to a particular day or occasion.

The noble poem on the Massacres of Piedmont is strictly a collect in verse.

The Sonnets are more or less striking, according as the occasions which gave birth to them are more or less interesting. But⁵ they are, almost without exception, dignified by a sobriety and greatness of mind to which we know not where to look for a parallel. It would, indeed, be scarcely safe to draw any decided inferences as to the character of a¹⁰ writer from passages directly egotistical. But the qualities which we have ascribed to Milton, though perhaps most strongly marked in those parts of his works which treat of his personal feelings, are distinguishable in every¹⁵ page, and impart to all his writings, prose and poetry, English, Latin, and Italian, a strong family likeness.

His public conduct was such as was to be expected from a man of a spirit so high and²⁰ of an intellect so powerful. He lived at one of the most memorable eras in the history of mankind; at the very crisis of the great conflict between Oromasdes and Arimanes, liberty and despotism, reason and prejudice.²⁵

24. **Oromasdes and Arimanes.** The former in the old Persian religion was regarded as the source of all good, the latter as the source of evil. They are also known as Ormuzd and Ahriman.

That great battle was fought for no single generation, for no single land. The destinies of the human race were staked on the same cast with the freedom of the English people.
5 Then were first proclaimed those mighty principles which have since worked their way into the depths of the American forests, which have roused Greece from the slavery and degradation of two thousand years, and which,
10 from one end of Europe to the other, have kindled an unquenchable fire in the hearts of the oppressed, and loosed the knees of the oppressors with an unwonted fear.

Of those principles, then struggling for
15 their infant existence, Milton was the most devoted and eloquent literary champion. We need not say how much we admire his public conduct. But we cannot disguise from ourselves that a large portion of his countrymen
20 still think it unjustifiable. The civil war, indeed, has been more discussed, and is less understood, than any event in English history. The friends of liberty labored under the disadvantage of which the lion in the fable

24 A fable of Æsop. A lion and a man traveling together came upon the statue of a man strangling a lion. "See how strong we are," said the man, "and how easily we can prevail over you." "Yes," answered the lion, "but had this statue been made by one of us, the man would have been under the lion's paw."

complained so bitterly. Though they were the conquerors, their enemies were the painters. As a body, the Roundheads had done their utmost to decry and ruin literature; and literature was even with them, as, in the ⁵ long run, it always is with its enemies. The best book on their side of the question is the charming narrative of Mrs. Hutchinson. May's "History of the Parliament" is good; but it breaks off at the most interesting crisis of the ¹⁰ struggle. The performance of Ludlow is foolish and violent; and most of the later writers who have espoused the same cause, Oldmixon, for instance, and Catherine Macaulay, have, to say the least, been more ¹⁵ distinguished by zeal than either by candor or by skill. On the other side are the most authoritative and the most popular historical works in our language,—that of Clarendon

3. **Roundhead.** A name given to the Puritans, because, unlike the Royalists, they cut their hair short.

8. **Mrs. Hutchinson,** (1620-1659.) She wrote a memoir of her husband, who was a soldier in the Parliamentary army.

8. **Thomas May,** (1594-1680.) Secretary to Parliament during the Civil War.

11. **Ludlow,** (1620-1693.) Wrote the memoirs of Cromwell to whom he was opposed.

14. **Oldmixon.** A Whig historian.

14. **Catherine Macaulay,** (1733-1791.) Author of a "History of England" from the reign of James I.

19. **Earl of Clarendon,** (1608-1674) A Royalist who became Prime Minister under Charles II.

and that of Hume. The former is not only ably written and full of valuable information, but has also an air of dignity and sincerity which makes even the prejudices and errors
5 with which it abounds respectable. Hume, from whose fascinating narrative the great mass of the reading public are still contented to take their opinions, hated religion so much that he hated liberty for having been allied
10 with religion, and has pleaded the cause of tyranny with the dexterity of an advocate while affecting the impartiality of a judge.

The public conduct of Milton must be approved or condemned, according as the
15 resistance of the people to Charles I. shall appear to be justifiable or criminal. We shall therefore make no apology for dedicating a few pages to that interesting and most important question. We shall not argue it on gen-
20 eral grounds. We shall not recur to those primary principles from which the claim of any government to the obedience of its subjects is to be deduced. We are entitled to that vantage ground ; but we will relinquish it.
25 We are, on this point, so confident of superiority, that we are not unwilling to imitate the

1. David Hume, (1711-1776.) One of the greatest philosophers and historians of England.

ostentatious generosity of those ancient knights who vowed to joust without helmet or shield against all enemies, and to give their antagonists the advantage of sun and wind. We will take the naked constitutional question. We ⁵ confidently affirm, that every reason which can be urged in favor of the Revolution of 1688 may be urged with at least equal force in favor of what is called the Great Rebellion.

In one respect only, we think, can the ¹⁰ warmest admirers of Charles venture to say that he was a better sovereign than his son. He was not, in name and profession, a Papist; we say in name and profession, because both Charles himself and his creature Laud, while ¹⁵ they abjured the innocent badges of Popery, retained all its worst vices, — a complete subjection of reason to authority, a weak preference of form to substance, a childish passion for mummeries, an idolatrous veneration for ²⁰ the priestly character, and, above all, a merciless intolerance. This, however, we waive. We will concede that Charles was a good

7. **Revolution of 1688.** That in which the Stuarts were driven from the English throne, which passed to William of Orange and the House of Hanover.

15. **William Laud, (1573-1645.)** He was Archbishop of Canterbury and persecuted the Protestants so bitterly that he was impeached by Parliament and beheaded on Tower Hill.

Protestant; but we will say that his Protestantism does not make the slightest distinction between his case and that of James.

The principles of the Revolution have often
5 been grossly misrepresented, and never more
than in the course of the present year. There
is a certain class of men who, while they profess to hold in reverence the great names and
actions of former times, never look at them
10 for any other purpose than in order to find in
them some excuse for existing abuses. In
every venerable precedent they pass by what
is essential, and take only what is accidental:
they keep out of sight what is beneficial, and
15 hold up to public imitation all that is defective. If, in any part of any great example,
there be anything unsound, these flesh flies
detect it with an unerring instinct, and dart
upon it with a ravenous delight. If some
20 good end had been attained in spite of them,
they feel, with their prototype, that their

“Labor must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil.”

To the blessings which England had derived
25 from the Revolution these people are utterly
insensible. The expulsion of a tyrant, the

solemn recognition of popular rights, — liberty, security, toleration, — all go for nothing with them. One sect there was, which, from unfortunate temporary causes, it was thought necessary to keep under close restraint. One part ⁵ of the empire there was, so unhappily circumstanced that at that time its misery was necessary to our happiness, and its slavery to our freedom. These are the parts of the Revolution which the politicians of whom we speak ¹⁰ love to contemplate, and which seem to them not indeed to vindicate, but in some degree to palliate, the good which it has produced. Talk to them of Naples, of Spain, or of South America. They stand forth zealots for the ¹⁵ doctrine of Divine Right, which has now come back to us, like a thief from transportation, under the *alias* of Legitimacy. But mention the miseries of Ireland. Then William is a hero. Then Somers and Shrewsbury are great ²⁰ men. Then the Revolution is a glorious era!

3. **sect.** The Catholics

6. **empire.** Ireland.

16. **Divine Right.** The Royalists under the Stuarts held that kings received their authority from God and that to oppose them was therefore to oppose God. At the time of this essay there was an attempt to pass a bill through Parliament giving Irish Catholics the right to vote and hold office. This was bitterly opposed by the Tory party.

19. **William III.** Prince of Orange.

20. **Somers and Shrewsbury.** Ministers of William.

The very same persons who, in this country, never omit an opportunity of reviving every wretched Jacobite slander respecting the Whigs of that period, have no sooner crossed St.
5 George's Channel than they begin to fill their bumpers to the glorious and immortal memory. They may truly boast that they look not at men but at measures. So that evil be done, they care not who does it; the arbitrary
10 Charles or the liberal William, Ferdinand the Catholic or Frederick the Protestant. On such occasions their deadliest opponents may reckon upon their candid construction. The bold assertions of these people have of
15 late impressed a large portion of the public with an opinion that James II. was expelled simply because he was a Catholic, and that the Revolution was essentially a Protestant revolution.

20 But this certainly was not the case, nor can any person who has acquired more knowledge of the history of those times than is to be

3. Jacobite. A term applied to the adherents of the Stuarts.

5. St. George's Channel. Separating England and Ireland.

10. Ferdinand V. King of Spain in the time of Columbus. He instituted the Inquisition.

11. Frederick V., (1596-1632.) One of the German Princes of the Palatinate and a leader of the Protestant party.

found in Goldsmith's "Abridgement" believe that, if James had held his own religious opinions without wishing to make proselytes, or if, wishing even to make proselytes, he had contented himself with exerting only his constitutional influence for that purpose, the Prince of Orange would ever have been invited over. Our ancestors, we suppose, knew their own meaning; and, if we may believe them, their hostility was primarily not to Popery,¹⁰ but to tyranny. They did not drive out a tyrant because he was a Catholic; but they excluded Catholics from the Crown because they thought them likely to be tyrants. The ground on which they, in their famous resolution,¹⁵ declared the throne vacant, was this, "that James had broken the fundamental laws of the kingdom." Every man, therefore, who approves of the Revolution of 1688 must hold that the breach of fundamental laws on the²⁰ part of the sovereign justifies resistance. The question, then, is this: Had Charles I. broken the fundamental laws of England?

No person can answer in the negative unless he refuses credit, not merely to all accusations²⁵

1. **Oliver Goldsmith**, (1728-1774.) He was forced by his poverty to do much hack work and this abridgement of his "History of England" is a sample of it.

brought against Charles by his opponents, but to the narratives of the warmest Royalists, and to the confessions of the king himself. If there be any truth in any historian of any
5 party who has related the events of that reign, the conduct of Charles, from his accession to the meeting of the Long Parliament, had been a continued course of oppression and treachery. Let those who applaud the Revolution and
10 condemn the Rebellion mention one act of James II. to which a parallel is not to be found in the history of his father. Let them lay their fingers on a single article in the Declaration of Right, presented by the two
15 Houses to William and Mary, which Charles is not acknowledged to have violated. He had, according to the testimony of his own friends, usurped the functions of the legislature, raised taxes without the consent of
20 Parliament, and quartered troops on the people in the most illegal and vexatious manner. Not a single session of Parliament had passed without some unconstitutional attack on the

7. *The Long Parliament.* So called because it continued, with but a single intermission, under Cromwell, from 1640 to the Restoration in 1660.

14. *Declaration of Right.* A bill containing a statement of the rights and privileges of Parliament and of the people, which had been violated by the Stuarts. It was only after signing this paper that William and Mary were acknowledged rulers of England.

freedom of debate. The right of petition was grossly violated. Arbitrary judgments, exorbitant fines, and unwarranted imprisonments were grievances of daily occurrence. If these things do not justify resistance, the Revolution⁵ was treason; if they do, the great Rebellion was laudable.

But, it is said, why not adopt milder measures? Why, after the king had consented to do so many reforms and renounced so many¹⁰ oppressive prerogatives, did the Parliament continue to rise in their demands at the risk of provoking a civil war? The ship money had been given up, the Star Chamber had been abolished, provision had been made for¹⁵ the frequent convocation and secure deliberation of Parliaments. Why not pursue an end confessedly good by peaceable and regular means? We recur again to the analogy of the Revolution. Why was James driven from the²⁰ throne? Why was he not retained upon conditions? He, too, had offered to call a free Parliament, and to submit to its decision all the matters in dispute. Yet we are in the habit of

13. **ship money.** A tax laid upon sea-ports in time of war to repel invasions. Charles I. tried to collect this tax from inland towns also.

14. **Star Chamber.** A court of justice instituted by the king and so named because it sat in a chamber decorated with gilt stars.

praising our forefathers, who preferred a revolution, a disputed succession, a dynasty of strangers, twenty years of foreign and intestine war, a standing army, and a national debt, to
5 the rule, however restricted, of a tried and proved tyrant. The Long Parliament acted on the same principle, and is entitled to the same praise. They could not trust the king. He had, no doubt, passed salutary laws; but
10 what assurance was there that he would not break them? He had renounced oppressive prerogatives; but where was the security that he would not resume them? The nation had to deal with a man whom no tie could bind;
15 a man who made and broke promises with equal facility; a man whose honor had been a hundred times pawned, and never redeemed.

Here, indeed, the Long Parliament stands on still stronger ground than the Convention
20 of 1688. No action of James can be compared to the conduct of Charles with respect to the Petition of Right. The Lords and Commons present him with a bill in which the constitutional limits of his power are marked

19. The Convention declaring the throne vacant. It took the place of Parliament which could not assemble in the absence of a king.

22. *Petition of Right.* A bill passed in the reign of Charles I. limiting the powers of the sovereign. Charles signed it but afterward broke all its provisions.

out. He hesitates; he evades; at last he bargains to give his assent for five subsidies. The bill receives his solemn assent; the subsidies are voted; but no sooner is the tyrant relieved than he returns at once to all the 5 arbitrary measures which he had bound himself to abandon, and violates all the clauses of the very act which he had been paid to pass.

For more than ten years the people had seen the rights which were theirs by a double 10 claim,—by immemorial inheritance and by recent purchase,—infringed by the perfidious king who had recognized them. At length circumstances compelled Charles to summon another Parliament. Another chance was 15 given to our fathers: were they to throw it away as they had thrown away the former? Were they again to be cozened by *le Roi le vent*? Were they again to advance their money on pledges which had been forfeited 20 over and over again? Were they to lay a second Petition of Right at the foot of the throne, to grant another lavish aid in exchange for another unmeaning ceremony, and then to take their departure, till, after ten years more 25 of fraud and oppression, their prince should

18. *le Roi le vent*. "The king wishes it." The formula which the sovereign uses in giving his assent to bills of Parliament.

again require a supply, and again reward it with a perjury? They were compelled to choose whether they would trust a tyrant or conquer him. We think that they chose
5 wisely and nobly.

The advocates of Charles, like the advocates of other malefactors against whom overwhelming evidence is produced, generally decline all controversy about the facts, and content them-
10 selves with calling testimony to character. He had so many private virtues! And had James II. no private virtues? Was Oliver Cromwell, his bitterest enemies themselves being judges, destitute of private virtues?
15 And what, after all, are the virtues ascribed to Charles? A religious zeal, not more sincere than that of his son, and fully as weak and narrow-minded, and a few of the ordinary household decencies which half the tombstones
20 in England claim for those who lie beneath them. A good father! A good husband! Ample apologies indeed for fifteen years of persecution, tyranny, and falsehood.

We charge him with having broken his
25 coronation oath; and we are told that he kept his marriage vow! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions

of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates; and the defense is that he took his little son on his knee, and kissed him! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good^s and valuable consideration, promised to observe them; and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning! It is to such considerations as these, together with his Vandyke dress, his¹⁰ handsome face, and his peaked beard, that he owes, we verily believe, most of his popularity with the present generation.

For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase, "a good man¹⁵ but a bad king." We can as easily conceive a good man and an unnatural father, or a good man and a treacherous friend. We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual, leave out of our consideration his conduct in²⁰ the most important of all human relations; and if in that relation we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of

1. Archbishop Laud.

10. **Vandyke**, (1599-1641.) More properly Van Dyck. A great portrait painter of Antwerp. He lived for many years in England and often painted Charles and the royal family. One of his most celebrated works is his picture of the three Stuart children.

all his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel.

We cannot refrain from adding a few words respecting a topic on which the defenders of
5 Charles are fond of dwelling. If, they say, he governed his people ill, he at least governed them after the example of his predecessors. If he violated their privileges, it was because those privileges had not been accurately
10 defined. No act of oppression has ever been imputed to him which has not a parallel in the annals of the Tudors. This point Hume has labored, with an art which is as discred-
itable in an historical work as it would be
15 admirable in a forensic address. The answer is short, clear, and decisive. Charles had assented to the Petition of Right. He had renounced the oppressive powers said to have been exercised by his predecessors, and he
20 had renounced them for money. He was not entitled to set up his antiquated claims against his own recent release.

These arguments are so obvious that it may seem superfluous to dwell upon them; but
25 those who have observed how much the events of that time are misrepresented and misunder-

12. Tudors. The ruling house in England from Henry VIII. to Queen Elizabeth.

stood, will not blame us for stating the case simply. It is a case of which the simplest statement is the strongest.

The enemies of the Parliament, indeed, rarely choose to take issue on the great points⁵ of the question. They content themselves with exposing some of the crimes and follies to which public commotions necessarily give birth. They bewail the unmerited fate of Strafford. They execrate the lawless violence¹⁰ of the army. They laugh at the scriptural names of the preachers. Major generals fleecing their districts; soldiers reveling on the spoils of a ruined peasantry; upstarts, enriched by the public plunder, taking possession of¹⁵ the hospitable firesides and hereditary trees of the old gentry; boys smashing the beautiful windows of cathedrals; Quakers riding naked through the market place; fifth-monarchy men shouting for King Jesus; agitators lecturing²⁰ from the tops of tubs on the fate of Agag;—all these, they tell us, were the offspring of the Great Rebellion.

10. **Earl of Strafford**, (1593-1641) A Whig who afterward joined the king's party. He was finally executed.

18. **Quakers**. The sect was founded by George Fox in 1640.

19. **Fifth-monarchy men**. A sect who believed that they were to prepare the way for the reign of Christ upon earth, which would follow as fifth in line, the Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman Monarchies.

21. **Agag**. The king of the Amalekites who was slain by Samuel.

Be it so. We are not careful to answer in this matter. These charges, were they infinitely more important, would not alter our opinion of an event which alone has made us
5 to differ from the slaves who crouch beneath despotic scepters. Many evils, no doubt, were produced by the civil war. They were the price of our liberty. Has the acquisition been worth the sacrifice? It is the nature of the
10 devil of tyranny to tear and rend the body which he leaves. Are the miseries of continued possession less horrible than the struggles of the tremendous exorcism?

If it were possible that a people brought up
15 under an intolerant and arbitrary system could subvert that system without acts of cruelty and folly, half the objections to despotic power would be removed. We should, in that case, be compelled to acknowledge that it at least
20 produces no pernicious effects on the intellectual and moral character of a nation. We deplore the outrages which accompany revolutions. But the more violent the outrages, the more assured we feel that a revolution was
25 necessary. The violence of those outrages will always be proportioned to the ferocity and ignorance of the people, and the ferocity and

ignorance of the people will be proportioned to the oppression and degradation under which they have been accustomed to live. Thus it was in our civil war. The heads of the Church and State reaped only what they had sown.⁵ The government had prohibited free discussion; it had done its best to keep the people unacquainted with their duties and their rights. The retribution was just and natural. If our rulers suffered from popular ignorance, it was¹⁰ because they had themselves taken away the key of knowledge. If they were assailed with blind fury, it was because they had exacted an equally blind submission.

It is the character of such revolutions that¹⁵ we always see the worst of them at first. Till men have been some time free, they know not how to use their freedom. The natives of wine countries are generally sober. In climates where wine is a rarity intemperance²⁰ abounds. A newly liberated people may be compared to a northern army encamped on the Rhine or the Xeres. It is said that, when soldiers in such a situation first find themselves able to indulge without restraint in such a rare²⁵ and expensive luxury, nothing is to be seen

1. **Xeres.** A Spanish town near Cadiz from which sherry wine takes its name.

but intoxication. Soon, however, plenty teaches discretion, and, after wine has been for a few months their daily fare, they become more temperate than they had ever been in their
5 own country. In the same manner, the final and permanent fruits of liberty are wisdom, moderation, and mercy. Its immediate effects are often atrocious crimes, conflicting errors, scepticism on points the most clear, dogmatism
10 on points the most mysterious. It is just at this crisis that its enemies love to exhibit it. They pull down the scaffolding from the half-finished edifice; they point to the flying dust, the falling bricks, the comfortless rooms, the
15 frightful irregularity of the whole appearance; and then ask in scorn where the promised splendor and comfort is to be found. If such miserable sophisms were to prevail there would never be a good house or a good government
20 in the world.

Ariosto tells a pretty story of a fairy, who, by some mysterious law of her nature, was condemned to appear at certain seasons in the form of a foul and poisonous snake. Those
25 who injured her during the period of her disguise were forever excluded from participation

in the blessings which she bestowed. But to those who, in spite of her loathsome aspect, pitied and protected her, she afterwards revealed herself in the beautiful and celestial form which was natural to her; accompanied⁵ their steps, granted all their wishes, filled their houses with wealth, made them happy in love and victorious in war. Such a spirit is Liberty. At times she takes the form of a hateful reptile. She grovels, she hisses, she stings. But¹⁰ woe to those who in disgust shall venture to crush her. And happy are those who, having dared to receive her in her degraded and frightful shape, shall at length be rewarded by her in the time of her beauty and her glory!¹⁵

There is only one cure for the evils which newly acquired freedom produces; and that cure is freedom. When a prisoner first leaves his cell he cannot bear the light of day; he is unable to discriminate colors, or recognize²⁰ faces. But the remedy is, not to remand him into his dungeon, but to accustom him to the rays of the sun. The blaze of truth and liberty may at first dazzle and bewilder nations which have become half blind in the house of²⁵ bondage. But let them gaze on, and they will soon be able to bear it. In a few years

men learn to reason. The extreme violence of opinions subsides. Hostile theories correct each other. The scattered elements of truth cease to contend, and begin to coalesce. And
5 at length a system of justice and order is educes out of the chaos.

Many politicians of our time are in the habit of laying it down as a self-evident proposition, that no people ought to be free till they are
10 fit to use their freedom. The maxim is worthy of the fool in the old story, who resolved not to go into the water till he had learned to swim. If men are to wait for liberty till they become wise and good in
15 slavery, they may indeed wait forever.

Therefore it is that we decidedly approve of the conduct of Milton, and the other wise and good men who, in spite of much that was ridiculous and hateful in the conduct of their
20 associates, stood firmly by the cause of public liberty. We are not aware that the poet has been charged with personal participation in any of the blamable excesses of that time. The favorite topic of his enemies is the line of
25 conduct which he pursued with regard to the execution of the king. Of that celebrated proceeding we by no means approve. Still

we must say, in justice to the many eminent persons who concurred in it, and in justice more particularly to the eminent person who defended it, that nothing can be more absurd than the imputations which, for the last⁵ hundred and sixty years, it has been the fashion to cast upon the Regicides. We have, throughout, abstained from appealing to first principles. We will not appeal to them now. We recur again to the parallel case of the¹⁰ Revolution. What essential distinction can be drawn between the execution of the father and the deposition of the son? What constitutional maxim is there which applies to the former and not to the latter? The king can¹⁵ do no wrong. If so, James was as innocent as Charles could have been. The minister, only, ought to be responsible for the acts of the sovereign. If so, why not impeach Jeffreys and retain James? The person of a king is²⁰ sacred. Was the person of James considered sacred at the Boyne? To discharge cannon

7. **Regicides.** The sixty-seven men who formed the court of justice which tried Charles I. Upon the return of the Stuarts many of them were executed, but three escaped to America. See Hawthorne's story, "The Gray Champion."

19. **Jeffreys,** (1648-1689.) Chief Justice under James II. He was noted for his cruelty and condemned over three hundred persons to death at the so-called "bloody assizes."

22. **Boyne.** A river in Ireland where in 1690 the battle was fought in which William of Orange defeated James II.

against an army in which a king is known to be posted is to approach pretty near to regicide. Charles, too, it should always be remembered, was put to death by men who
5 had been exasperated by the hostilities of several years, and who had never been bound to him by any other tie than that which was common to them with all their fellow-citizens. Those who drove James from his throne, who
10 seduced his army, who alienated his friends, who first imprisoned him in his palace, and then turned him out of it, who broke in upon his very slumbers by imperious messages, who pursued him with fire and sword from one
15 part of the empire to another, who hanged, drew, and quartered his adherents, and attainted his innocent heir, were his nephew and his two daughters. When we reflect on all these things, we are at a loss to conceive
20 how the same persons who, on the 5th of November, thank God for wonderfully conducting his servant William, and for making all opposition fall before him, until he became our king and governor, can, on the 30th of

17. William of Orange.

18. Mary, who married William, and Anne, the future queen, who took his part.

21. On the 5th of November William landed in England.

January, contrive to be afraid that the blood of the Royal Martyr may be visited on themselves and their children.

We disapprove, we repeat, of the execution of Charles; not because the constitution⁵ exempts the king from responsibility, for we know that all such maxims, however excellent, have their exceptions; nor because we feel any particular interest in his character, for we think that his sentence describes him with¹⁰ perfect justice as "a tyrant, a traitor, a murderer, and a public enemy;" but because we are convinced that the measure was most injurious to the cause of freedom. He whom it removed was a captive and a hostage; his¹⁵ heir, to whom the allegiance of every Royalist was instantly transferred, was at large. The Presbyterians could never have been perfectly reconciled to the father; they had no such rooted enmity to the son. The great body of²⁰ the people, also, contemplated that proceeding with feelings which, however unreasonable, no government could safely venture to outrage.

But though we think the conduct of the Regicides blamable, that of Milton appears to²⁵ us in a very different light. The deed was

1. Charles I. was executed on the 30th of January, 1649.

done. It could not be undone. The evil was incurred; and the object was to render it as small as possible. We censure the chiefs of the army for not yielding to the popular⁵ opinion; but we cannot censure Milton for wishing to change that opinion. The very feeling which would have restrained us from committing the act would have led us, after it had been committed, to defend it against the¹⁰ ravings of servility and superstition. For the sake of public liberty we wish that the thing had not been done while the people disapproved of it. But, for the sake of public liberty, we should also have wished the people¹⁵ to approve of it when it was done. If anything more were wanting to the justification of Milton, the book of Salmasius would furnish it. That miserable performance is now with justice considered only as a beacon to word-²⁰ catchers, who wish to become statesmen. The celebrity of the man who refuted it, the "*Æneæ magni dextra*," gives it all its fame with the present generation. In that age the state of things was different. It was then

17. Salmasius, (1588-1653.) The French scholar who wrote the "Defence of Charles I."

22. *Æneid* X., 833. A proverbial expression for the fate of an obscure person who suffers at the hands of a famous one. "Thou fallest by the right hand of the great *Æneas*."

not fully understood how vast an interval separates the mere classical scholar from the political philosopher. Nor can it be doubted that a treatise which, bearing the name of so eminent a critic, attacked the fundamentals⁵ principles of all free governments, must, if suffered to remain unanswered, have produced a most pernicious effect on the public mind.

We wish to add a few words relative to another subject, on which the enemies of¹⁰ Milton delight to dwell,—his conduct during the administration of the Protector. That an enthusiastic votary of liberty should accept office under a military usurper seems, no doubt, at first sight extraordinary. But all¹⁵ the circumstances in which the country was then placed were extraordinary. The ambition of Oliver Cromwell was of no vulgar kind. He never seems to have coveted despotic power. He at first fought sincerely and manfully for²⁰ the parliament, and never deserted it till it had deserted its duty. If he dissolved it by force, it was not till he found that the few members who remained after so many deaths, sessions, and expulsions, were desirous to appropriate²⁵ to themselves a power which they held only in

12. **Protector.** The title assumed by Cromwell.

trust, and to inflict upon England the curse of a Venetian oligarchy. But even when thus placed by violence at the head of affairs, he did not assume unlimited power. He gave
5 the country a constitution far more perfect than any which had at that time been known in the world. He reformed the representative system in a manner which has extorted praise even from Lord Clarendon. For himself he
10 demanded, indeed, the first place in the Commonwealth; but with powers scarcely so great as those of a Dutch stadtholder or an American president. He gave the Parliament a voice in the appointment of ministers, and
15 left to it the whole legislative authority, not even reserving to himself a veto on its enactments; and he did not require that the chief magistracy should be hereditary in his family. Thus far, we think, if the circumstances of the
20 time and the opportunities which he had of aggrandizing himself be fairly considered, he will not lose by comparison with Washington or Bolivar. Had his moderation been met by corresponding moderation, there is no

2. Venetian oligarchy. At the end of the thirteenth century Venice fell completely into the hands of a few despots.

12. stadtholder. Governor of a province.

23. Bolivar. The leader of the revolt against Spanish rule by the South American colonies.

reason to think that he would have overstepped the line which he had traced for himself. But when he found that his Parliaments questioned the authority under which they met, and that he was in danger of being⁵ deprived of the restricted power which was absolutely necessary to his personal safety, then it must be acknowledged he adopted a more arbitrary policy.

Yet, though we believe that the intentions¹⁰ of Cromwell were at first honest, though we believe that he was driven from the noble course which he had marked out for himself by the almost irresistible force of circumstances, though we admire, in common with¹⁵ all men of all parties, the ability and energy of his splendid administration, we are not pleading for arbitrary and lawless power, even in his hands. We know that a good constitution is infinitely better than the best despot. But²⁰ we suspect, that at the time of which we speak, the violence of religious and political enmities rendered a stable and happy settlement next to impossible. The choice lay, not between Cromwell and liberty, but between Cromwell²⁵ and the Stuarts. That Milton chose well no man can doubt who fairly compares the events

degrading insults and her more degrading gold. The caresses of harlots and the jests of buffoons regulated the policy of the state. The government had just ability enough to
5 deceive, and just religion enough to persecute. The principles of liberty were the scoff of every grinning courtier, and the Anathema Maranatha of every fawning dean. In every high place, worship was paid to Charles and
10 James, Belial and Moloch; and England propitiated those obscene and cruel idols with the blood of her best and bravest children. Crime succeeded to crime, and disgrace to disgrace, till the race, accursed of God and man, was a
15 second time driven forth, to wander on the face of the earth, and to be a byword and a shaking of the head to the nations.

Most of the remarks which we have hitherto made on the public character of Milton apply
20 to him only as one of a large body. We shall proceed to notice some of the peculiarities which distinguished him from his contemporaries. And for that purpose it is necessary to take a short survey of the parties into which
25 the political world was at that time divided.

7. **Anathema Maranatha.** A form of denunciation found in I. Cor. XVI. 22, meaning "Let him be accursed, the Lord cometh."

10. **Belial and Moloch.** Idols of the Ammonites.

We must premise that our observations are intended to apply only to those who adhered, from a sincere preference, to one or to the other side. In days of public commotion every faction, like an Oriental army, is attended⁵ by a crowd of camp followers, a useless and heartless rabble, who prowl round its line of march in the hope of picking up something under its protection, but desert it in the day of battle, and often join to exterminate it after a¹⁰ defeat. England, at the time of which we are treating, abounded with fickle and selfish politicians, who transferred their support to every government as it rose; who kissed the hand of the king in 1640, and spat in his face in 1649,¹⁵ who shouted with equal glee when Cromwell was inaugurated in Westminster Hall, and when he was dug up to be hanged at Tyburn; who dined on calves' heads, or stuck up oak branches, as circumstances altered, without²⁰ the slightest shame or repugnance. These we leave out of the account. We take our estimate of parties from those who really deserve to be called partisans.

We would speak first of the Puritans, the²⁵

19. **calves' heads** were used by the Whigs as an emblem of Charles I.

20. **oak branches.** Charles II. once concealed himself in an oak tree when he was trying to escape from England. On his restoration the oak branch was used as the royal emblem for festivals.

most remarkable body of men, perhaps, which the world has ever produced. The odious and ridiculous parts of their character lie on the surface. He that runs may read them; nor
5 have they been wanting attentive and malicious observers to point them out. For many years after the Restoration they were the theme of unmeasured invective and derision. They were exposed to the utmost licentious-
10 ness of the press and of the stage, at the time when the press and the stage were most licentious. They were not men of letters; they were, as a body, unpopular; they could not defend themselves; and the public would not
15 take them under its protection. They were therefore abandoned, without reserve, to the tender mercies of the satirists and dramatists. The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff pos-
20 ture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the scriptural phrases which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed fair game for the laughers. But
25 it is not from the laughers alone that the philosophy of history is to be learned. And he who approaches this subject should care-

fully guard against the influence of that potent ridicule which has already misled so many excellent writers.

“Ecco il fonte del riso, ed ecco il rio
Che mortali perigli in se contiene:
Hor qui tener a fren nostro desio,
Ed esser cauti molto a noi conviene.”

5

Those who roused the people to resistance; who directed their measures through a long series of eventful years; who formed, out of 10 the most unpromising materials, the finest army that Europe had ever seen; who trampled down king, church, and aristocracy; who, in the short intervals of domestic sedition and rebellion, made the name of England 15 terrible to every nation on the face of the earth,—were no vulgar fanatics. Most of their absurdities were mere external badges, like the signs of freemasonry, or the dresses of friars. We regret that these badges were 20 not more attractive. We regret that a body to whose courage and talents mankind has owed inestimable obligations, had not the

7. Tasso's “*Gerusalemme Liberata*.” XV., 57.

“This is the source of laughter and the stream
Which mortal perils in itself contains;
Now here to restrain in bonds our desire,
And resolve to be strong becomes us.”

25

20. *friar*. A Latin word meaning *brother* and applied to the four mendicant order of monks.

lofty elegance which distinguished some of the adherents of Charles I., or the easy good breeding for which the court of Charles II. was celebrated. But if we must make our
5 choice, we shall, like Bassanio in the play, turn from the specious caskets which contain only the death's-head and the fool's head, and fix on the plain leaden chest which conceals the treasure.

10 The Puritans were men whose minds had derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. Not content with acknowledging, in general terms, an overruling Providence,
15 they habitually ascribed every event to the will of the Great Being, for whose power nothing was too vast, for whose inspection nothing was too minute. To know Him, to serve Him, to enjoy Him, was with them the
20 great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring
25 veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intoler-

5. **Bassanio.** "Merchant of Venice," Act III., scene 2. In order to win Portia for his wife, he is obliged to choose among three caskets the one that contains her portrait.

able brightness, and to commune with Him face to face. Hence originated their contempt for terrestrial distinctions. The difference between the greatest and the meanest of mankind seemed to vanish, when compared with⁵ the boundless interval which separated the whole race from Him on whom their own eyes were constantly fixed. They recognized no title to superiority but His favor; and, confident of that favor, they despised all the¹⁰ accomplishments and all the dignities of the world. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of¹⁵ heralds, they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with²⁰ hands; their diadems, crowns of glory which should never fade away. On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and priests, they looked down with contempt; for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, and²⁵ eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by the right of an earlier creation, and priests

by the imposition of a mightier hand. The very meanest of them was a being to whose fate a mysterious and terrible importance belonged, on whose slightest action the spirits
5 of light and darkness looked with anxious interest; who had been destined, before heaven and earth were created, to enjoy a felicity which should continue when heaven and earth should have passed away. Events
10 which shortsighted politicians ascribed to earthly causes had been ordained on his account. For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed His will by the
15 pen of the Evangelist and the harp of the prophet. He had been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the sweat of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly
20 sacrifice. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God.

25 Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men; the one all self-abasement,

1. **Imposition.** Priests are ordained by the "imposition" of the bishop's hands.

penitence, gratitude, passion; the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker; but he set his foot on the neck of his king. In his devotional retirement, he prayed with convulsions, and groans, and tears. He was half-maddened by glorious or terrible illusions. He heard the lyres of angels or the tempting whispers of fiends. He caught a gleam of the Beatific Vision; or woke screaming from¹⁰ dreams of everlasting fire. Like Vane, he thought himself intrusted with the sceptre of the millennial year. Like Fleetwood, he cried in the bitterness of his soul that God had hid his face from him. But when he took his seat¹⁵ in the council, or girt on his sword for war these tempestuous workings of the soul had left no perceptible trace behind them. People who saw nothing of the godly but their uncouth visages, and heard nothing from them²⁰ but their groans and their whining hymns, might laugh at them. But those had little reason to laugh who encountered them in the hall of debate or in the field of battle. These

10. **Beatific Vision.** The direct sight of God in Mediæval theology. A term often applied to the Book of Revelation.

11. **Sir Henry Vane**, (1612-1662.) A Puritan governor of Massachusetts who returned to England and was finally beheaded.

13. **Fleetwood.** Son-in-law of Cromwell and general in his army.

fanatics brought to civil and military affairs a coolness of judgment and an immutability of purpose which some writers have thought inconsistent with their religious zeal, but
5 which were in fact the necessary effects of it. The intensity of their feelings on one subject made them tranquil on every other. One overpowering sentiment had subjected to itself pity and hatred, ambition and fear. Death
10 had lost its terrors and pleasure its charms. They had their smiles and their tears, their raptures and their sorrows, but not for the things of this world. Enthusiasm had made them Stoics, had cleared their minds from
15 every vulgar passion and prejudice, and raised them above the influence of danger and of corruption. It sometimes might lead them to pursue unwise ends, but never to choose unwise means. They went through the world,
20 like Sir Artegal's iron man Talus with his flail, crushing and trampling down oppressors, mingling with human beings, but having neither part nor lot in human infirmities; insensible to fatigue, to pleasure, and to pain;

14. **Stoics.** A philosophical sect who held that all sensations, whether of pleasure or pain, should be a matter of indifference to men.

20. **Talus.** Spencer's "*Faerie Queene*." V., 1. An iron man, representing power, was given to Sir Artegal, the personification of justice, with which to thresh out falsehood and unfold truth.

not to be pierced by any weapon, not to be withstood by any barrier.

Such we believe to have been the character of the Puritans. We perceive the absurdity of their manners. We dislike the sullen gloom⁵ of their domestic habits. We acknowledge that the tone of their minds was often injured by straining after things too high for mortal reach; and we know that, in spite of their hatred of Popery, they too often fell into the¹⁰ worst vices of that bad system,—intolerance and extravagant austerity; that they had their anchorites and their crusades, their Dunstans and their DeMontforts, their Dominics and their Escobars. Yet, when all¹⁵ circumstances are taken into consideration, we do not hesitate to pronounce them a brave, a wise, an honest, and a useful body.

The Puritians espoused the cause of civil liberty mainly because it was the cause of relig-²⁰ ion. There was another party, by no means numerous, but distinguished by learning and

14. **St. Dunstan**, (924-988.) Archbishop of Canterbury.

14. **Montfort**, (1150-1226.) A French nobleman noted for the cruelty with which he persecuted the Albigenses who seceded from the Roman church.

14. **Dominic**. Founder of the Dominican Friars and associate of Mountfort.

15 **Escobar**, (1589-1669.) The Spanish Jesuit who set forth the doctrine that the end justifies the means

ability, which acted with them on very different principles. We speak of those whom Cromwell used to call the Heathens, men who were, in the phraseology of that time, doubting
5 Thomases or careless Gallios with regard to religious subjects, but passionate worshippers of freedom. Heated by the study of ancient literature, they set up their country as their idol, and proposed to themselves the heroes
10 of Plutarch, as their examples. They seem to have borne some resemblance to the Brissotines of the French Revolution. But it is not very easy to draw the line of distinction between them and their devout associates,
15 whose tone and manner they sometimes found it convenient to affect, and sometimes, it is probable, imperceptibly adopted.

We now come to the Royalists. We shall attempt to speak of them, as we have spoken
20 of their antagonists, with perfect candor. We shall not charge upon a whole party the profligacy and baseness of the horse boys, gamblers, and bravoës, whom the hope of license and plunder attracted from all the dens of

5. Thomases. John XX. 24, 25.

5. Gallios. Acts XVIII., 17.

10. Plutarch. A Greek biographer of the first century.

11. Brissotines. The followers of Brissot, who, with the Girondists, formed the moderate republican party in the French Revolution.

Whitefriars to the standard of Charles, and who disgraced their associates by excesses which, under the stricter discipline of the parliamentary armies, was never tolerated. We will select a more favorable specimen.⁵ Thinking as we do that the cause of the king was the cause of bigotry and tyranny, we yet cannot refrain from looking with complacency on the character of the honest old Cavaliers. We feel a national pride in comparing them¹⁰ with the instruments which the despots of other countries are compelled to employ; with the mutes who throng their antechambers, and the Janissaries who mount guard at their gates. Our Royalist countrymen were not¹⁵ heartless, dangling courtiers, bowing at every step, simpering at every word. They were not mere machines for destruction, dressed up in uniforms, caned into skill, intoxicated into valor, defending without love, destroying with-²⁰ out hatred. There was a freedom in their subserviency, a nobleness in their very degradation. The sentiment of individual independence was strong within them. They were

1. **Whitefriars.** A district of London formerly notorious as a resort for criminals on account of an old privilege preventing the arrest of its inhabitants.

14. **Janissaries.** A body of Turkish troops organized in the fourteenth century as the Sultan's body-guard, and composed mostly of Christian captives

indeed misled, but by no base or selfish motive. Compassion and romantic honor, the prejudices of childhood, and the venerable names of history, threw over them a spell
5 potent as that of Duessa; and, like the Red Cross Knight, they thought that they were doing battle for an injured beauty, while they defended a false and loathsome sorceress. In truth, they scarcely entered at all into the
10 merits of the political question. It was not for a treacherous king or an intolerant church that they fought, but for the old banner which had waved in so many battles over the heads of their fathers, and for the altars at which they
15 had received the hands of their brides. Though nothing could be more erroneous than their political opinions, they possessed in a far greater degree than their adversaries, those qualities which are the grace of private life.
20 With many of the vices of the Round Table, they had also many of its virtues, — courtesy, generosity, veracity, tenderness, and respect for women. They had far more both of profound and of polite learning than the Puritans.

5. **Duessa** A character in the "Faerie Queene," Book I, personifying false faith.

6. **Red Cross Knight** A principal character in the same book representing St George of England.

20 **vices.** Described in Tennyson's "Last Tournament."

Their manners were more engaging, their tempers more amiable, their tastes more elegant, and their households more cheerful.

Milton did not strictly belong to any of the classes which we have described. He was not a Puritan. He was not a freethinker. He was not a Royalist. In his character the noblest qualities of every party were combined in harmonious union. From the Parliament and from the court, from the conventicle and from the Gothic cloister, from the gloomy and sepulchral circles of the Roundheads, and from the Christmas revel of the hospitable Cavalier, his nature selected and drew to itself whatever was great and good, while it rejected all the base and pernicious ingredients by which those finer elements were defiled. Like the Puritans, he lived

As ever in his great Taskmaster's eye.

Like them, he kept his mind continually fixed on an Almighty Judge and an eternal reward. And hence he acquired their contempt of external circumstances, their fortitude, their tranquillity, their inflexible resolution. But

¹⁰ **Conventicle.** The Non-conformists The word originally meant a cabal among the monks of a monastery.

¹¹ **cloister.** Episcopalians.

¹⁹. From Milton's seventh sonnet on his Twenty-third Birthday.

not the coolest sceptic or the most profane scoffer was more perfectly free from the contagion of their frantic delusions, their savage manners, their ludicrous jargon, their scorn of science, and their aversion to pleasure. ⁵ Hating tyranny with a perfect hatred, he had nevertheless all the estimable and ornamental qualities which were almost entirely monopolized by the party of the tyrant. There was ¹⁰ none who had a stronger sense of the value of literature, a finer relish for every elegant amusement, or a more chivalrous delicacy of honor and love. Though his opinions were democratic, his tastes and his associations were ¹⁵ such as harmonize best with monarchy and aristocracy. He was under the influence of all the feelings by which the gallant Cavaliers were misled. But of those feelings he was the master and not the slave. Like the hero of ²⁰ Homer, he enjoyed all the pleasures of fascination; but he was not fascinated. He listened to the song of the Sirens; yet he glided by without being seduced to their fatal shore. He tasted the cup of Circe; but he bore about

19. hero. Ulysses.

22 Sirens. Maidens who lured passing mariners to their island home by their beautiful singing, and then destroyed them.

24. Circe. A sorceress who changed into swine Ulysses's companions.

him a sure antidote against the effects of its bewitching sweetness. The illusions which captivated his imagination never impaired his reasoning powers. The statesman was proof against the splendor, the solemnity, and the⁵ romance which enchanted the poet. Any person who will contrast the sentiments expressed in his treatises on Prelacy with the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture and music in the "Penseroso," which was published¹⁰ about the same time, will understand our meaning. This is an inconsistency which, more than anything else, raises his character in our estimation, because it shows how many private tastes and feelings he sacrificed in¹⁵ order to do what he considered his duty to mankind. It is the very struggle of the noble Othello. His heart relents; but his hand is firm. He does naught in hate, but all in honor. He kisses the beautiful deceiver²⁰ before he destroys her.

That from which the public character of Milton derives its great and peculiar splendor still remains to be mentioned. If he exerted himself to overthrow a foresworn king and a²⁵ persecuting hierarchy, he exerted himself in

conjunction with others. But the glory of the battle which he fought for the species of freedom which is the most valuable, and which was then the least understood, the
5 freedom of the human mind, is all his own. Thousands and tens of thousands among his contemporaries raised their voices against ship money and the Star Chamber. But there were few indeed who discerned the more
10 fearful evils of moral and intellectual slavery, and the benefits which would result from the liberty of the press and the unfettered exercise of private judgment. These were the objects which Milton justly conceived to be the most
15 important. He was desirous that the people should think for themselves as well as tax themselves, and should be emancipated from the dominion of prejudice as well as from that of Charles. He knew that those who, with
20 the best intentions, overlooked these schemes of reform, and contented themselves with pulling down the king and imprisoning the malignants, acted like the heedless brothers in his own poem, who, in their eagerness to
25 disperse the train of the sorcerer, neglected the means of liberating the captive. They

23. **Malignants** A term applied to the royalists.

thought only of conquering when they should have thought of disenchanting.

“Oh, ye mistook, ye should have snatched his wand,
And bound him fast; without his wand reversed
And backward mutters of dissevering power, 5
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fix'd, and motionless.”

To reverse the rod, to spell the charm backward, to break the ties which bound a stupefied people to the seat of enchantment, 10 was the noble aim of Milton. To this all his public conduct was directed. For this he joined the Presbyterians; for this he forsook them. He fought their perilous battle; but he turned away with disdain from their 15 insolent triumph. He saw that they, like those whom they had vanquished, were hostile to the liberty of thought. He therefore joined the Independents, and called upon Cromwell to break the secular chain, and to 20 save free conscience from the paw of the Presbyterian wolf. With a view to the same great object, he attacked the licensing system, in

7. “Comus,” 815-819.

20 **secular chain.** Alliance between church and state.

22 **Presbyterian wolf.** An expression used by Milton in “*Lycidas*,” line 128, and in the Sonnet to Cromwell.

23 **licensing system** In his “*Areopagitica*,” a plea for the liberty of unlicensed printing

that sublime treatise which every statesman should wear as a sign upon his hand and as frontlets between his eyes. His attacks were, in general, directed less against particular
5 abuses than against those deeply seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded,—the servile worship of eminent men and the irrational dread of innovation.

That he might shake the foundations of
10 these debasing sentiments more effectually, he always selected for himself the boldest literary services. He never came up in the rear, when the outworks had been carried and the breach entered. He pressed into the forlorn hope.
15 At the beginning of the changes, he wrote with incomparable energy and eloquence against the bishops. But, when his opinion seemed likely to prevail, he passed on to other subjects, and abandoned prelacy to the
20 crowd of writers who now hastened to insult a falling party. There is no more hazardous enterprise than that of bearing the torch of truth into those dark and infected recesses in which no light has ever shone. But it was
25 the choice and the pleasure of Milton to penetrate the noisome vapors, and to brave

3. frontlet. Referring to an old Jewish custom of wearing phylacteries upon the forehead.

the terrible explosion. Those who most disapprove of his opinions must respect the hardihood with which he maintained them. He, in general, left to others the credit of expounding and defending the popular parts ⁵ of his religious and political creed. He took his own stand upon those which the great body of his countrymen reprobated as criminal, or derided as paradoxical. He stood up for divorce and regicide. He attacked the pre-¹⁰ vailing systems of education. His radiant and beneficent career resembled that of the god of light and fertility:—

“Nitor in adversum; nec me, qui cætera, vincit
Impetus, et rapido contrarius evehor orbi.”

15

It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language.²⁰ They abound with passages compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field

15. Ovid's "Metamorphoses," ll., 71, 73. "I contend against opposing circumstances. That force which subdues other things conquers not me, and I am borne on a way contrary to the swiftly moving earth."

22. **Edmund Burke**, (1728-1797.) One of the greatest of English orators and statesmen. Noted for the lofty splendor of his style, and a firm friend of the American colonies.

of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the "Paradise Lost" has the great poet ever risen higher than in those
5 parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, "a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping
10 symphonies."

We had intended to look more closely at these performances, to analyze the peculiarities of the diction, to dwell at some length on the sublime wisdom of the "Arcopagitica"
15 and the nervous rhetoric of the "Iconoclast," and to point out some of those magnificent passages which occur in the "Treatise of Reformation," and the "Animadversions on the Remonstrant." But the length to which
20 our remarks have already extended renders this impossible.

We must conclude. And yet we can scarcely tear ourselves away from the subject. The days immediately following the publishing

15. **Iconoclast.** A reply to a book portraying the King in his solitude and suffering.

18 **Animadversions on the Remonstrant.** A dialogue in which Milton's adversary is made to ask questions to which he replies.

of this relic of Milton appear to be peculiarly set apart, and consecrated to his memory. And we shall scarcely be censured if, on his festival, we be found lingering near his shrine, how worthless soever may be the offering ⁵ which we bring to it. While this book lies on our table, we seem to be contemporaries of the writer. We are transported a hundred and fifty years back. We can almost fancy that we are visiting him in his small lodging; that ¹⁰ we see him sitting at the old organ beneath the faded green hangings; that we can catch the quick twinkle of his eyes, rolling in vain to find the day; that we are reading in the lines of his noble countenance the proud and ¹⁵ mournful history of his glory and his affliction. We image to ourselves the breathless silence in which we should listen to his slightest word; the passionate veneration with which we should kneel to kiss his hand and weep upon it; the ²⁰ earnestness with which we should endeavor to console him, if indeed such a spirit could need consolation, for the neglect of an age unworthy of his talents and his virtues; the eagerness with which we should contest with his daugh- ²⁵ ters, or with his Quaker friend Ellwood, the

26. Ellwood. A Quaker faithful to Milton in his later years.

privilege of reading Homer to him, or of taking down the immortal accents which flowed from his lips.

These are perhaps foolish feelings. Yet we
5 cannot be ashamed of them; nor shall we be sorry if what we have written shall in any degree excite them in other minds. We are not much in the habit of idolizing either the living or the dead. And we think there is no
10 more certain indication of a weak and ill-regulated intellect than that propensity which, for want of a better name, we will venture to christen Boswellism. But there are a few characters which have stood the closest scrutiny and the severest tests, which have been
15 tried in the furnace and have proved pure, which have been weighed in the balance and have not been found wanting, which have been declared sterling by the general consent of
20 mankind, and which are visibly stamped with the image and superscription of the Most High. These great men we trust that we know how to prize; and of these was Milton. The sight of his books, the sound of his name, are
25 pleasant to us. His thoughts resemble those celestial fruits and flowers which the Virgin

¹³ **Boswellism.** Boswell, the famous biographer of Dr. Johnson, fairly worshipped his friend and master.

Martyr of Massinger sent down from the gardens of Paradise to the earth, and which were distinguished from the productions of other soils, not only by superior bloom and sweetness, but by miraculous efficacy to ⁵ invigorate and to heal. They are powerful not only to delight, but to elevate and purify. Nor do we envy the man who can study either the life or writings of the great poet and patriot, without aspiring to emulate, not indeed ¹⁰ the sublime works with which his genius has enriched our literature, but the zeal with which he labored for the public good, the fortitude with which he endured every private calamity, the lofty disdain with which he looked down ¹⁵ on temptations and dangers, the deadly hatred which he bore to bigots and tyrants, and the faith which he so sternly kept with his country and with his fame.

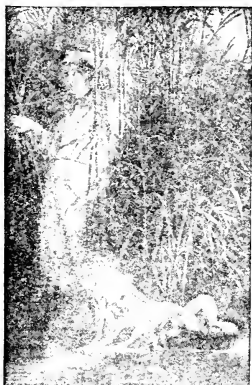
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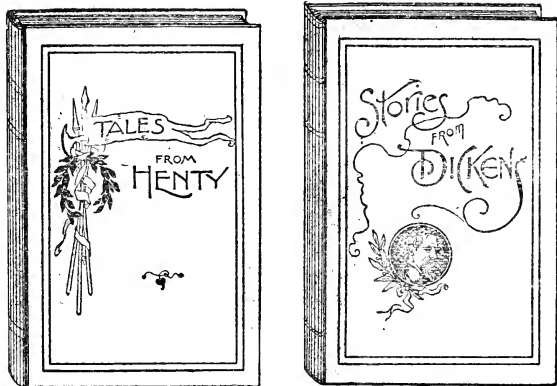
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